

# ART, HESYCHASM, AND VISUAL EXEGESIS

## Parisinus Graecus 1242 Revisited

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THE INTRIGUING yet elusive relationship between hesychasm<sup>1</sup> and Late Byzantine art has claimed the attention of scholars for almost a century.<sup>2</sup> Although diverse, and often wide-ranging, speculations have been advanced, hardly any agreement on any given topic has been reached so far. Where to localize and how to define the points of convergence—or rather divergence—between the hesychast movement with its theology and mysticism and the visual arts still remains a vexing problem. The variety of ways in which the term *hesychasm* has been understood and used may partially account for the lack of agreement on the subject.<sup>3</sup> The term is a derivative of the word ἡσυχία—literally meaning “quietude,” “tranquility,” or “stillness”—which was a traditional designation for the contemplative solitary way of

monastic life in general.<sup>4</sup> More narrowly defined, the term may refer to a particular spiritual practice, fully developed by the thirteenth century, which enjoyed great popularity among Late Byzantine monks. This practice was centered on the so-called “prayer of the heart” or “prayer of Jesus,” a psychosomatic method of monastic prayer and contemplation designed to achieve communion with God and the vision of the divine light, the same light that the apostles had seen on Mount Tabor at Christ’s Transfiguration.<sup>5</sup> The term *hesychasm* is also used to designate the system of doctrinal concepts formulated by Gregory Palamas (ca. 1296–1359), partly in defense of the aforementioned spiritual practice, and officially promulgated at several church councils held in Constantinople in the middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The term may, finally, stand for an entire monastic movement, which—although generated by a somewhat exclusive revival of the tradition of ἡσυχία—came to play a major role in the redefinition of Late Byzantine Orthodoxy and ultimately exerted a tremendous impact on the political, social, and religious life of the Empire and its Orthodox satellites in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. It is in this last sense that the term hesychasm is used in the present article.

A claim has been made that the hesychast movement was a creative force in the artistic production of the Late Byzantine period which should be credited with the promotion of a new stylistic idiom that spread throughout the Orthodox world. The popularity of ascetic physiognomies, the expressive use of highlights, especially on faces, a tendency toward linearism and

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1 The bibliography on hesychasm is immense. See especially J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959); idem, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* (London, 1974); G. Podskalsky, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz: Der Streit um die theologische Methodik in der spätbyzantinischen Geistesgeschichte (14./15. Jh.), seine systematischen Grundlagen und seine historische Entwicklung* (Munich, 1977); D. M. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 1979); D. Krausmüller, “The Rise of Hesychasm,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 5, *Eastern Christianity*, ed. M. Angold (Cambridge, 2006), 101–26.

2 Among the early studies on the subject, see especially M. M. Vasić, *Žiža i Lazarica: Studije iz srpske umetnosti srednjeg veka* (Belgrade, 1928), 163–237; and L. Bréhier, “La rénovation artistique sous les Paléologues et le mouvement des idées,” in *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1930), 2:1–10.

3 For the problems related to the use of the term, see J. Meyendorff, “Is ‘Hesychasm’ the Right Word? Remarks on Religious Ideology in the Fourteenth Century,” in *Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on His Sixtieth Birthday by His Colleagues and Students*, ed. C. Mango and O. Pritsak, *HUkSt* 7 (1983): 447–56.

4 All translations from the Greek are my own. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible is used for Scripture quotations in English.

5 See I. Hausherr, *La méthode d’oraison hésychaste*, *Orientalia Christiana* 9.2 (Rome, 1927), esp. 101–34.

6 On Gregory Palamas, see R. E. Sinkewicz, “Gregory Palamas,” in *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition (XIIIe–XIXe s.)*, ed. C. G. Conticello and V. Conticello (Turnhout, 2002), 131–88, and the references cited in n. 1.

reduced color schemes, and a renewed interest in individual psychology and *états d'âme*—all these features, exemplified by the work of Theophanes the Greek (d. ca. 1410), have been seen as the defining elements of the new idiom.<sup>7</sup> Instances of the movement's fruitful contribution to the formulation of novel iconographic themes, in monumental painting in particular, have also been detected. Among the subjects purportedly inspired by the writings of the leading hesychast theologians or, more broadly, by the general revival of monastic spirituality are, for instance, the themes of the Virgin *Zoodochos Pege* and Christ *Sophia*, the composition of the Heavenly Liturgy, and the pictorial cycle of the Akathistos Hymn. The proliferation of hagiographic scenes depicting holy monks and hermits and a new iconographic recension of the Metamorphosis have been attributed to the same source of inspiration.<sup>8</sup>

Another school of thought, however, chiefly promoted by the influential work of Viktor Lazarev, sees the impact of hesychasm exclusively in negative terms.<sup>9</sup> Following an implicit model of Late Byzantine cultural dynamics predicated on the perennial conflict between Christian humanism and monastic rigorism, it denounces the movement as a “reactionary” factor responsible for the suspension of the classicizing tendencies of the Early Palaiologan “Renaissance.” John Meyendorff has maintained that this supposed “withering” of Byzantine art after the middle of the fourteenth century was most likely caused by economic rather than intellectual factors. In his opinion, as a system of doctrinal concepts and a spiritual revival championing the ideals of asceticism and solitary

contemplation, hesychasm could not have had a significant effect on the visual arts.<sup>10</sup> Hans-Georg Beck went a step further arguing that hesychasm was inherently iconophobic.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, the theologians of the movement offered nothing comparable to a new theory of images, and their interest in art seems to have been altogether minimal or, even worse, nonexistent. Besides, premised on the ideal of aniconic devotion, the strictures of the hesychast psychosomatic method of prayer banished all images from the devotee's mind. And yet, as Beck himself has aptly remarked, there is a fundamental aspect that brings together hesychast mysticism and icon veneration: “Das große Gemeinsame ist das Verlangen nach Schau. Hier treffen sich Hesychasmus und Ikonen kult zu einer letzten gemeinsamen Haltung: Schau als Ausgangspunkt und Zielpunkt für jegliche Erhebung des Geistes und Quelle jeglichen religiösen Affekts.”<sup>12</sup>

Style versus iconography, humanism versus mysticism, iconic versus aniconic devotion—the question of whether there was a hesychast influence on art has all too often been framed in terms of these binary oppositions. A more nuanced approach, one aimed at contextualizing works of art in relation to the broad patterns of patronage, social and religious affiliations, devotional practices, and modes of artistic production in Late Byzantium, might yield a better understanding of the problem. Annemarie Weyl Carr is right in observing that “Hesychasm embraced a spectrum of lifestyles, ranging from scholarly aristocratic office holders to radically ascetic troglodytes, and was unlikely to have produced a unified attitude to something as conventionally social as art.”<sup>13</sup>

7 See N. K. Goleizovskii, “Poslanie ikonopistsu i otgoloski isikhazma v russkoi zhivopisi na rubezhe XV–XVI vv.,” *VizVrem* 26 (1965): 219–38; idem, “Isikhazm i russkaia zhivopis' XIV–XV vv.,” *VizVrem* 29 (1968): 196–210; M. V. Alpatov, “Iskusstvo Feofana Greka i uchenie isikhas-tov,” *VizVrem* 33 (1972): 190–202; G. I. Vzdornov, *Freski Feofana Greka v tserkvi Spasa Preobrazheniia v Novgorode* (Moscow, 1976), esp. 236–58; and more recently O. Popova, *Ascesi e trasfigurazione: Immagini dell'arte bizantina e russa nel XIV secolo* (Milan, 1996).

8 For the scholarly approach that locates the influence of hesychasm in the domain of iconography, see, e.g., E. Bakalova, “Kŭm vŭprosa za otrazhenieto na isihazma vŭrhu izkustvoto,” in *Tŭrnovska knizhovna shkola, 1371–1971*, ed. P. Rusev et al. (Sofia, 1974), 373–89; T. Velmans, *La peinture murale byzantine à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1977), 54–57; eadem, “Le rôle de l'hésychasme dans la peinture murale byzantine du XIVe et XVe siècles,” in *Ritual and Art: Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter*, ed. P. Armstrong (London, 2006), 182–226.

9 V. N. Lazarev, *Theophanes der Grieche und seine Schule*, trans. J. Buscha (Vienna, 1968), esp. 14–34; idem, *Storia della pittura bizantina* (Turin, 1967), esp. 372–73.

10 J. Meyendorff, “Spiritual Trends in Byzantium in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries,” in *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4, *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background*, ed. P. A. Underwood (New York, 1975), 99, 105–106; idem, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1980), 138–44. For a similar view, see A. E. Tachiaos, “Hesychasm as a Creative Force in the Fields of Art and Literature,” in *L'art de Thessalonique et des pays balkaniques et les courants spirituels au XIVe siècle*, ed. D. Davidov (Belgrade, 1987), 117–23.

11 See H.-G. Beck, *Von der Fragwürdigkeit der Ikone* (Munich, 1975), esp. 37–44. See also J. Gouillard, “Contemplation et imagerie sacrée dans le christianisme byzantin,” *Annuaire de la Ve Section de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études* 86 (1977–78): 29–50. Gregory Palamas and his followers were even accused of desecrating icons. See Meyendorff, “Spiritual Trends,” 105.

12 Beck, *Von der Fragwürdigkeit*, 41.

13 A. W. Carr, “Images: Expressions of Faith and Power,” in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)*, ed. H. C. Evans (New York, 2004), 151.

The present article sets out to explore the series of images found in the lavish edition of theological works of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (ca. 1295–1383, r. 1347–1354) in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS gr. 1242). Since its association with hesychasm has never been questioned, this manuscript provides a particularly apposite case for studying the movement's relationship with art. Rather than defining what a "hesychast art" might be, this article examines the ways in which hesychast mysticism and doctrine may have informed the production, and even more importantly, the reception of a work of art. In the first part of the article I shall present the manuscript and its pictorial program as a whole, dwelling at some length upon the polemical, apologetic, and laudatory character of its miniatures and their relationship with the text. The second and longer part of the article is devoted to a close reading of one miniature, the full-page image of the Transfiguration of Christ (Fig. 3). This splendid depiction of the theophany on Mount Tabor is repeatedly invoked by scholars as *the* paradigmatic visualization of the hesychast ideas about the divine light.<sup>14</sup> Yet, where precisely its theological specificity lies has never been fully elucidated, nor has the miniature's place within the manuscript and its association with the text been taken into account in exploring its meaning. Instead of drawing straightforward connections between hesychast thought and the miniature's iconography, I shall attempt to examine how this image would have been viewed and understood by its original viewers. The individual iconographic and formal elements of the Paris Transfiguration, I shall argue, have their own tradition independent of any specifically hesychast context. Invested with allusiveness and a rich pictorial referentiality, these elements were manipulated in order to articulate a hesychast interpretation of the scriptural narrative, providing the manuscript's audience with an aesthetically sophisticated and semantically multivalent rendition of the venerable feast image. The discussion of the Transfiguration miniature is followed by a brief excursus on the metaphor of the body as garment, a concept which, I believe, allows us to view the miniature portraying John VI Kantakouzenos as emperor and as monk (Fig. 2) against the background of hesychast ideas about the deification of the body. In the conclusion, I shall first touch upon the context in which the Paris codex was produced and then, after hav-

ing summarized the argument advanced in the article, I shall briefly return to the larger question of hesychasm's impact on the visual arts.

### "Great Is the God of the Christians"

Following his abdication in 1354, Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos took monastic vows and the name Ioasaph, and retired to the monastery of St. George of the Mangana in Constantinople.<sup>15</sup> A man of manifold talents—a distinguished statesman, military commander, and scholar—he remained a figure of paramount importance in the political and religious affairs of the Empire, commanding a strong presence from the monastery enclosure.<sup>16</sup> During the last thirty years of his life, while he was a monk, Kantakouzenos wrote his extensive memoirs, the *Histories*, and also composed several polemical treatises attacking Islam and Judaism as well as works in support of hesychast doctrine and practice. Unique among the preserved manuscripts of Kantakouzenos's theological writings, the Paris exemplar is a deluxe codex of superb penmanship and artistry.<sup>17</sup> Written in black ink and gold on chalky white parchment, it is decorated with full-page miniatures on gold background, illuminated headpieces, and ornamental initials.<sup>18</sup> The manuscript was produced

15 On Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos, see G. Weiss, *Joannes Kantakouzenos: Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch in der Gesellschaftsentwicklung von Byzanz im 14. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1969); D. M. Nicol, *The Reluctant Emperor: A Biography of John Cantacuzene, Byzantine Emperor and Monk, c. 1295–1383* (Cambridge, 1996); idem, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460: A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study* (Washington, DC, 1968), 35–103.

16 See especially Lj. Maksimović, "Politička uloga Jovana Kantakouzina posle abdikacije (1354–1383)," *ZRVI* 9 (1966): 116–93.

17 On Bibliothèque Nationale, MS gr. 1242, see H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VI<sup>e</sup> au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1929), 58–59; E. Voordeckers, "Examen codicologique du Codex Parisinus Graecus 1242," *Scriptorium* 21, no. 2 (1967): 288–94; I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976), 129–37; idem, *Corpus of Dated Illuminated Greek Manuscripts to the Year 1453*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1981), 1: no. 269; V. J. Djurić, "Les miniatures du manuscrit Parisinus Graecus 1242 et l'Hésychasme," in *L'art de Thessalonique* (n. 10 above), 89–94; P. Guran, "Jean VI Cantacuzène, l'hésychasme et l'empire: les miniatures du codex Parisinus graecus 1242," in *L'empereur hagiographe: culte des saints et monarchie byzantine et post-byzantine*, ed. idem (Bucharest, 2001), 73–121. For a fairly complete list of bibliographic references, see *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, cat. no. 171 (J. Lowden).

18 In its present state, the codex contains 437 folios measuring

14 For the relevant bibliography, see below, nn. 17 and 63.

in the scriptorium of the Hodegon monastery in Constantinople by the scribe Ioasaph (d. 1406), one of the most outstanding calligraphers of the Palaiologan era,<sup>19</sup> who completed his work in February 1375.<sup>20</sup>

The codex is a compilation of different materials. It opens with a text representing the first part of the *Tomos* of the Constantinopolitan Council of 1351 (fols. 2r–4r), convened and presided over by John VI Kantakouzenos, which vindicated the doctrines of Gregory Palamas and condemned his adversaries. Following the text of the *Tomos* is a portion of a treatise, composed by Kantakouzenos, against an anti-Palamite monk and scholar, Prochoros Kydones (ca. 1333/34–1369/70), whose teachings were later condemned at another church council convened in Constantinople in 1368 (fols. 5r–8r).<sup>21</sup> The major part of the codex contains four long theological tracts. The first is a treatise against the “blasphemies” of Isaac Argyros (d. ca. 1375), a mathematician, astronomer, and opponent of Palamas (fols. 9r–70v). The second tract consists of the correspondence between Kantakouzenos and Paul, the papal legate and titular Latin patriarch of Constantinople (1366–1371), largely devoted to the problems raised by the hesychast controversy (fols. 70r–119v). The codex concludes with a treatise against the “Mohammedans,” divided into four apologies and four orations (fols. 120r–292v), and a treatise against the Jews in nine chapters (fols. 293r–436v). Dealing with the most pressing theological issues of the day and engaging in the ongoing polemic with Islam and Judaism, this encyclopedic

undertaking represents a magisterial exposition of Late Byzantine Orthodoxy.

The production of the manuscript must have been closely supervised by Kantakouzenos himself. It is not clear, however, to whom this lavish edition was originally intended to be presented.<sup>22</sup> An entry found on the last folio, 437v, shows that, at some point after its completion, the codex entered the library of the monastery of St. Anastasia Pharmakolytria in Chalkidike, not far from the city of Thessalonike, and the possibility that the codex was destined for this monastery from the outset should not be excluded.<sup>23</sup> Yet no links between the emperor and the monastery of St. Anastasia are attested in other sources, and the history of the monastery in the later Middle Ages is entirely obscure.<sup>24</sup>

Illuminated editions of theological treatises are fairly rare in Byzantium.<sup>25</sup> In the surviving corpus of Late Byzantine manuscripts the Paris codex is virtually unique. In its present state, the manuscript features four large miniatures on gold background: a depiction of a

33.5 × 23.5 cm with text written in minuscule script and laid out in double columns per page.

**19** Ioasaph left his name on four folios (70r, 119v, 292r, and 436v) using the conventional formula “the gift of God and labor of Ioasaph” (Θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον καὶ Ἰωάσαφ πόνος). On Ioasaph and the Hodegon scriptorium, see L. Politis, “Eine Schreiberschule im Kloster τῶν Ὁδηγῶν,” *BZ* 51 (1958): 17–36, 261–87; idem, “Nouvelles données sur Ioasaph, copiste du monastère des Hodèges,” *ICS* 7, no. 2 (1982): 299–322.

**20** The Paris codex, in fact, has two dated colophons. The first, on folio 119v, is of November 1370 (+ ἡ παρούσα βιβλος ἐγράφη κατὰ μῆνα νοέμβριον τῆς ἐννάτης ἰνδικτιῶνος τοῦ ρωο' ἐννάτου ἔτους). As observed by Spatharakis (*Portrait* [n. 17 above], 131–32), it was possibly written by a different hand. The second colophon by the hand of Ioasaph appears at the end of the manuscript (fol. 436v) and gives the date of its completion (+ ἐτελειώθη ἡ παρούσα βιβλος συνάρσει Θεοῦ κατὰ μῆνα φερουαρίου τῆς ιγ' ἰνδικτιῶνος τοῦ ρωπγ' ἔτους).

**21** Not only does the text of the treatise abruptly break off, but the name of Prochoros Kydones in the title (fol. 6r) has been erased and replaced by the name of another anti-Palamite polemicist, Isaac Argyros. For a detailed codicological analysis of the manuscript and a possible explanation of the alterations made to it, see Voordeckers, “Examen codicologique” (n. 17 above), 288–94.

**22** Voordeckers (*ibid.*, 293) hypothesized that Kantakouzenos may have presented the manuscript to his friend, the writer and theologian Nicholas Kabasilas. Yet his suggestion is purely conjectural.

**23** The entry does not specify the circumstances under which the manuscript reached the monastery but simply marks its ownership: + βιβλίον τῆς μεγαλομάρτυρος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας τῆς Φαρμακολυτρίας: — τῆς ἐν τῷ Μεγάλῳ Βουνῷ κειμένης. If this marginal note is indeed by the hand of Ioasaph, as Spatharakis (*Portrait*, 131) believes, then it is reasonable to assume that the codex was donated to the monastery by Kantakouzenos himself. Another entry found on folio 225r, which also mentions the monastery of St. Anastasia (τὸ παρὸν ὑπάρχει τῆς ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας τῆς Φαρμακολυτρίας), was certainly written by a later hand. See Voordeckers, “Examen codicologique,” 288 n. 3.

**24** Although the prime recipient of his largesse was the monastery of Vatopedi on Mount Athos, Kantakouzenos is known to have been the patron of a number of monastic establishments in the Empire and even beyond. For a collection of deluxe manuscripts donated to Vatopedi, see E. Lamberz, “Die Schenkung des Kaisers Johannes VI. Kantakouzenos an das Kloster Vatopedi und die Schreibzentren Konstantinopels im 14. Jahrhundert,” in *Acts: XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies; Selected Papers, and Main Communications; Moscow, 1991*, ed. I. Ševčenko and G. G. Litavrin, 4 vols. (Shepherdstown, WV, 1996), 4:155–67. For Kantakouzenos's patronage in general, see Nicol, *Reluctant Emperor* (n. 15 above), 140–42. For the monastery of St. Anastasia, see P. N. Papageorgiou, “Ἐκδρομὴ εἰς τὴν βασιλικὴν καὶ πατριαρχικὴν μονὴν τῆς ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας τῆς Φαρμακολυτρίας τὴν ἐν τῇ Χαλκιδικῇ,” *BZ* 7 (1898): 57–82; A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, “Ἡ μονὴ Ἀναστασίας τῆς Φαρμακολυτρίας,” *BZ* 10 (1901): 193–99; J. Darrouzès, “Les manuscrits du monastère Sainte-Anastasie Pharmacolytria de Chalcidique,” *REB* 12 (1954): 45–57, esp. 45–48.

**25** See K. Weitzmann, “The Selection of Texts for Cyclical Illustration in Byzantine Manuscripts,” in *Byzantine Books and Bookmen: A Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium* (Washington, DC, 1975), esp. 106–9.

church council summoned by the emperor, an image of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, a portrait of Gregory of Nazianzos, and a double portrait of the emperor-monk. The offset on folio 70v and the stubs of two missing leaves of the next quire suggest that at least one full-page miniature has been cut out. An inscription on folio 70v states that the emperor used as evidence for his writings excerpts from the “saints seen here” (οἱ ἐντεῦθεν ὁρώμενοι τῶν ἁγίων).<sup>26</sup> Clearly, the excised miniature depicted a group of Church Fathers.<sup>27</sup>

The first miniature of the codex (fol. 5v) shows a church council presided over by John VI Kantakouzenos (Fig. 1). Seated on a high-backed throne, the emperor is depicted in the middle as the largest and most commanding figure, labeled as “John in Christ God faithful *Basileus* and *Autokrator* of the Romans Palaiologos Angelos Kantakouzenos” (+ Ἰω[άννης] ἐν Χ[ριστῷ] τῷ Θ[εῷ] πιστὸς βασιλεὺς καὶ αὐτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων Παλαιολόγος Ἄγγελος ὁ Κα[ν]τακουζηνός). Fully clad in imperial attire, complete with the bejeweled *kamelaukion*, the dark brown *sakkos*, and the gold embroidered *loros*, he holds a cruciform scepter in his right hand and a red *akakia* in his left hand. The *suppedion* at his feet is adorned with two double-headed eagles. The emperor is flanked by four haloed bishops, seated on a synthronon-like semicircular bench and ornately dressed in the liturgical vestments of their office. The foreground figures are surrounded by monks, court dignitaries sporting fanciful brimmed hats, or *skiadia*,<sup>28</sup> and a group of individuals with uniform white beehive-shaped headdresses known as *skaranika*.<sup>29</sup> The sword-bearer behind the emperor’s throne to the right most likely represents the *megas domestikos*.<sup>30</sup>

It is generally assumed that this miniature depicts the pro-Palamite Council of 1351, held in the *Alexiakos*

*Triklinos* of the Blachernai Palace in Constantinople.<sup>31</sup> There is no clear indication, however, that this is the case. Christopher Walter has argued that the image does not refer to any particular ecclesiastical assembly but rather presents the emperor in his traditional doctrinal role.<sup>32</sup> Be that as it may, like any other image of a church council presided over by an emperor, the Paris miniature essentially restates in visual terms one of the basic tenets of Byzantine political ideology, namely, the notion of one ecumenical Christian society governed by the emperor—the God-chosen ruler, defender of Orthodoxy and guardian of the Church. To this general ideological statement the miniature adds a significant nuance. The Late Byzantine Church assembled around the figure of the emperor is admittedly dominated by monks. Of the thirty-two individuals portrayed on either side of Kantakouzenos, more than half belong to the monastic estate, including the four bishops whose black *epirrhiptaria* clearly bespeak their status as ex-monks.

The importance of monasticism in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Palaiologan Empire is too well known to be reiterated here.<sup>33</sup> Suffice it to say that the most authoritative figures who occupied the see of Constantinople in the fourteenth century were monks of strongly hesychast inclination, usually trained on Mount Athos. Isidore I (1347–1350) was an Athonite monk, and both of his successors, Kallistos I (1350–1353, 1355–1363) and Philotheos Kokkinos (1353–1354, 1364–1376), had been *hegoumenoi*, the former of the monastery of Iviron, the latter of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the

26 Voordeckers, “Examen codicologique,” 289 n. 5.

27 As Spatharakis (*Portrait* [n. 17 above], 136) has observed, it may have resembled the solemn file of saints who present scrolls containing their works to Emperor Alexios I (1081–1118) in the Vatican copy of the *Panoplia Dogmatica* of Euthymios Zygabenos (MS gr. 666, fols. 1v–2r). For the frontispieces of this manuscript, see *ibid.*, 122–29, figs. 78–79.

28 See E. Piltz, *Le costume officiel des dignitaires byzantins à l’époque Paléologue* (Uppsala, 1994), *passim*.

29 In Spatharakis’ opinion (*Portrait*, 134), these figures are “probably officials of the Great Church.” However, white *skaranika* were also worn by several categories of court officials and dignitaries as well as by singers. See V. Tsamakda, *The Illustrated Chronicle of Ioannes Skylitzes in Madrid* (Leiden, 2002), esp. 360–61; N. K. Moran, *Singers in Late Byzantine and Slavonic Painting* (Leiden, 1986), 37 et *passim*.

30 As noted by Spatharakis, *Portrait*, 134.

31 Attempts have been made to identify the four bishops on either side of the emperor as Kallistos I of Constantinople, Philotheos Kokkinos of Herakleia, Gregory Palamas of Thessalonike, and Arsenios of Kyzikos. This identification is based on the order of signatures placed at the end of the *Tomos* issued at this council. See Spatharakis, *Portrait*, 132–34. Given his privileged position, as well as the patriarchal staff he carries, the bishop directly to the right of the emperor is, without doubt, the patriarch of Constantinople. If the miniature really depicts the Council of 1351, then it is curious that it is not appended to the text of the *Tomos*. In fact, it originally stood at the beginning of Kantakouzenos’s treatise against Prochoros Kydones, whose anti-Palamite teachings were condemned at the Constantinopolitan Council of 1368.

32 C. Walter, *L’iconographie des conciles dans la tradition byzantine* (Paris, 1970), 70–73. Quasi-historical depictions of church councils are well attested in the art of the Byzantine world. See, e.g., D. Vojvodić, “Un regard nouveau sur la représentation du Concile de saint Siméon-Nemanja à Arilje,” *Cahiers Balkaniques* 31 (2000): 11–19.

33 See Nicol, *Church and Society* (n. 1 above), esp. 31–65.

34 See J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford, 1986), 289.



**Fig. 1**

John VI Kantakouzenos presiding over the Constantinopolitan Council of 1351 (?), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS gr. 1242, fol. 5v, ca. 1370–1375 (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

Komnenian era, when appointments to major bishoprics were customarily reserved for the clerics of the Great Church,<sup>35</sup> during the Late Byzantine period higher positions in the ecclesiastical hierarchy were largely monopolized by monks. The same process of “monasticization” can be observed elsewhere in the Orthodox world. It is no accident that the unparalleled expansion of Palaiologan art and learning in the Balkans and Eastern Europe,

35 See P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge, 1993), 317–20.

and the formation of a fascinating cosmopolitan intellectual circle, which Alexandru Elian has aptly styled “internationale hésychaste,”<sup>36</sup> were essentially monastic accomplishments.<sup>37</sup> The emperor may have been the defender and guardian of Orthodoxy, but as the miniature

36 A. Elian, “Byzance et les Roumains à la fin du Moyen Age,” in *Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, ed. J. M. Hussey et al. (London, 1967), 199.

37 See D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, 2nd ed. (London, 2000), esp. 301–8, 336–43, 358–59.



**Fig. 2**

John VI Kantakouzenos as emperor and as monk, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS gr. 1242, fol. 123v, ca. 1370–1375 (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

of the council intimates, its final arbiter was the monastic Church headed by the hesychasts.

The second portrait of Kantakouzenos in the Paris manuscript is found at the beginning of the first apology against Islam (fol. 123v, Fig. 2). The miniature shows him in two guises—as emperor and as monk.<sup>38</sup> As emperor,

<sup>38</sup> Even though he had been tonsured, Kantakouzenos still laid claim to certain signs of imperial dignity. This is particularly evident in the forms of titulature applied to the ex-emperor after his abdication. See Maksimović, “Politička uloga Jovana Kantakuzina” (n. 16 above), 144–46. Yet both of his portraits in the Paris codex lack an absolutely

John VI Kantakouzenos assumes the strictly frontal hieratic stance of official imperial portraiture.<sup>39</sup> He wears the same sumptuous attire and insignia of power seen in the

indispensable element of imperial iconography—the nimbus. This highly unusual omission was probably meant to indicate that he was not the ruling emperor at that time and, therefore, was not entitled to the nimbus *ex dignitate officii*. For a different interpretation, see Guran, “Jean VI Cantacuzène” (n. 17 above), 93–95.

<sup>39</sup> This type of stance ultimately evokes the ritual staging of the emperor’s epiphany before his subjects in the ceremonial mystique of the Byzantine court. See T. Velmans, “Le portrait dans l’art des Paléologues,” in *Art et société à Byzance sous les Paléologues* (Venice, 1971), 101–2.

miniature of the council, and his official titles and noble lineage are also repeated word for word in the appended caption (Ιω[άννης] ἐν Χ[ριστῷ] τῷ Θ[ε]ῷ πιστὸς βασιλεὺς κ[αὶ] αὐτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων Παλεολόγος Ἄγγελος ὁ Καντακουζηνός). A *suppedion* graced with double-headed eagles is appropriately placed underneath the emperor's feet. As the monk Ioasaph, Kantakouzenos is portrayed as somewhat older, wrapped in the dark "angelic" habit of his calling. The figure is not labeled, perhaps in keeping with the ideal of monastic abnegation. In his left hand the monk Ioasaph holds a scroll inscribed with the words "Great is the God of the Christians" (Μέγας ὁ Θεὸς τῶν Χριστιανῶν)—the *incipit* of his first anti-Muslim apology, which opens on the facing folio 124r—while his right hand is raised pointing to the image of the three angels from the *Philoxenia* of Abraham, a familiar Byzantine depiction of the Old Testament Trinity.

The overall iconographic conception of the miniature is virtually without precedent and must have been created specifically for this manuscript. On the most basic level, it is the author's portrait, but indeed a highly unusual one. As Hans Belting has pointed out, the painter adapted a formula customarily used for memorial images in funerary context.<sup>40</sup> Double-portraits above the tomb depicting the same individual in both lay and monastic guises appear to have been fairly common in the Palaiologan period.<sup>41</sup> The inclusion of the Old Testament Trinity and the inscription on Ioasaph's scroll, on the other hand, engage the image in visual polemic, lending further strength to the argument expounded in the text.<sup>42</sup> Since both

Christianity and Islam acknowledged the authority of the Jewish Scriptures, in his treatise against the "Mohammedans" Kantakouzenos resorted to a well-known *exemplum* in order to defend Christ's divinity and the notion of the Triune Godhead, namely, to the story of the three angels entertained by Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18:1–16).<sup>43</sup> According to the Old Testament account, Abraham addressed one of the three angels "My Lord." Given that God the Father could not appear in human form, Kantakouzenos contended that it was Christ who had manifested himself in the form of an angel.<sup>44</sup> The miniature thus makes a clear reference to the text—all the more so since the middle angel of the *Philoxenia* is appropriately cross-nimbed.<sup>45</sup> What is significant is that the biblical composition is here mobilized in the service of theological polemic as an argument in its own right, a point to which I shall return shortly.

Perhaps the appeal of this image lies precisely in its ambiguity. The miniature conflates different genres—official imperial imagery, the semi-private portrait of an author, and a symbolically charged biblical narrative—in a composite whole of arresting iconic quality. Confronted with the portrayal of the same individual depicted, as it were, in two incarnations and surmounted by the canonical Orthodox representation of the Holy Trinity, the viewer is inevitably invited to meditate on the paradox of the two natures, divine and human, hypostatically united in the one person of Christ.

The double portrait of an emperor-monk by the name of Ioasaph must have struck a familiar chord with the fourteenth-century audience. As Vojislav J. Djurić has already observed, it unmistakably conjured up the hagiographic portrait of an illustrious namesake of Kantakouzenos who was known through the immensely popular *Romance of Barlaam and Ioasaph*.<sup>46</sup> This edifying story of uncertain date and authorship recounts the conversion to Christianity of a young Indian prince named Ioasaph by the hermit Barlaam. Reflecting to some extent the life of Buddha, it narrates the prince's renunciation of power and wealth and his withdrawal to the desert in order to

40 H. Belting, *Das illuminierte Buch in der spätbyzantinischen Gesellschaft* (Heidelberg, 1970), 84–88.

41 See U. Weißbrod, 'Hier liegt der Knecht Gottes . . .': Gräber in byzantinischen Kirchen und ihr Dekor (11. bis 15. Jahrhundert): Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Höhlenkirchen Kappadokiens (Wiesbaden, 2003), 130–34. The often-cited epigram composed by Christopher Mitylenaios for the tomb of a certain *patrikios* Melias confirms that the *Doppelporträt* formula had been established well before the Palaiologan period. See *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios*, ed. E. Kurtz (Leipzig, 1903), no. 16, 9–10. For several Komnenian examples known from textual sources, see T. Papamastorakes, "Επιτύμβιες παραστάσεις κατά τη μέση και ύστερη βυζαντινή περίοδο," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 19 (1996–97): 297.

42 Kantakouzenos had every reason to advertise his anti-Muslim sentiments. During the civil wars that ravaged the Empire in the mid-fourteenth century, he allied himself more than once with the Ottoman Turks. This rather embarrassing aspect of his career threatened to tarnish the image of a pious Christian ruler that he was striving to project. See especially F. Tinnefeld, "Idealizing Self-Centered Power Politics in the Memoirs of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos," in *TO ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟΝ: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.*, ed. J. S. Langdon et al., 2 vols. (New Rochelle, NY, 1993), 1:407–11.

43 Kantakouzenos's treatise against the "Mohammedans" is heavily indebted to Demetrios Kydones' Greek translation of the *Improbatio Alcorani*, a polemical work against the Koran written by the Dominican Ricoldo da Monte Croce. See Nicol, *Church and Society* (n. 1 above), 79. Kantakouzenos's treatise is published in PG 154:371–692.

44 PG 154:385A–C.

45 As noted by Spatharakis, *Portrait* (n. 17 above), 136.

46 Djurić, "Miniatures" (n. 17 above), 93–94.

live the virtuous life of prayer, penitence, and spiritual *askesis*.<sup>47</sup> The popularity of the romance in Byzantium led to the development of a full-fledged cult of SS. Barlaam and Ioasaph, which appears to have gained wide currency by the Palaiologan era.<sup>48</sup> Gradually, the cult acquired political overtones as well. Replete with moralizing *dicta* and exhortations concerning royal conduct, the life of the legendary prince turned monk came to be read as a kind of *speculum principis*.<sup>49</sup> It offered a paradigm of kingship that happily united the sacred character of Christian monarchy with the ideal of personal sanctity achieved through the practice of ascetic monasticism. Not surprisingly, in the Orthodox world of the later Middle Ages it was considered quite appropriate, if not desirable, for rulers to be tonsured and spend the rest of their earthly existence in monastic seclusion. Even if Kantakouzenos's abdication and retreat to the Mangana monastery were not exactly motivated by desire to follow the *exemplum Ioasaphi*, the choice of his monastic name was without doubt deliberate.<sup>50</sup> The audience of the Paris manuscript would not have failed to recognize in the double portrait a flattering allusion to the emperor-monk as the Second or New Ioasaph.

The remaining two miniatures of the manuscript pertain directly to the ideas and themes promoted by the hesychast movement. A full-page miniature representing the Transfiguration of Christ (Ἡ Μεταμόρφωσις) is

on folio 92v (Fig. 3). It is a superb image of exceptional artistry. Clad in white, Christ is depicted standing on the top of Mount Tabor holding a scroll in his left hand and making a gesture of blessing with his right hand.<sup>51</sup> The figure is surrounded by a resplendent mandorla rendered as a complex geometrical configuration consisting of two superimposed and overlapping forms, a concave square and a rhombus, inscribed within two concentric circles from whose center radiate beams of light. Perched on rocky peaks above cave-like openings, the two prophets flank the figure of Christ—Elijah on the left, and Moses, holding the Tablets of the Law, on the right. Below, in the lower section of the composition, the three disciples are shown overcome by dread. John, in the middle, and James, on the right, both fall precipitously on their faces, while Peter, on the left, cringes on the ground gesturing toward Christ; unable to gaze at the blazing body of the transfigured Lord, he shields his eyes with his left hand.

A three-quarter-folio miniature on the facing page (fol. 93r) shows the portrait of Gregory of Nazianzos accompanied by a faintly legible inscription, Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος (Fig. 4).<sup>52</sup> Fully vested in the bishop's liturgical garments, Gregory is seated on a backless throne set against a uniform background of gold leaf. He holds a large codex and gestures toward the image of the Metamorphosis on the opposite page.

The two miniatures are placed within the section of the manuscript containing the correspondence with the papal legate Paul; more precisely, they are inserted in Kantakouzenos's fourth epistle to Paul.<sup>53</sup> There is

47 For the Greek text and an English translation of the romance, see *St. John Damascene, Barlaam and Ioasaph*, trans. G. R. Woodward and H. Mattingly (London, 1914); *Historia animae utilis de Barlaam et Ioasaph*, ed. R. Volk (Berlin–New York, 2009). See also “Barlaam and Ioasaph,” *ODB* 1:256–57; S. Der Nersessian, *L'illustration du roman de Barlaam et Ioasaph*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1937).

48 The spread of the cult is perhaps best exemplified by the pictorial record of Sts. Barlaam and Ioasaph. For the representations of the monastic pair in Late Byzantium, see S. E. J. Gerstel, “Civic and Monastic Influences on Church Decoration in Late Byzantine Thessalonike,” *DOP* 57 (2003): 232–33. The official liturgical commemoration of St. Ioasaph is first attested in a *synaxarion* of 1301 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Coislin 223), written for Ioannikios, *protos* of Mount Athos. See *Synaxarium CP*, XLI, 926.60.

49 In fact, the Greek text of the romance contains two lengthy excerpts from an Early Byzantine *speculum principis*, composed by Agapetos the Deacon for Emperor Justinian. See I. Ševčenko, “A Neglected Byzantine Source of Muscovite Political Ideology,” *HS/St* 2 (1954): 148–50. For the political significance of the romance, see also V. J. Djurić, “Le nouveau Joasaph,” *CahArch* 33 (1985): 99–109; and P. Guran, “L'aurole de l'empereur: Témoignage iconographique de la légende de Barlaam et Josaphat,” *Medioevo greco* 1 (2001): 161–86.

50 For other examples of the Orthodox rulers of the later Middle Ages who chose the name Ioasaph on the occasion of their monastic profession, see Guran, “L'aurole de l'empereur,” 172.

51 The identification of Mount Tabor in Galilee south of Nazareth with the site of Christ's Metamorphosis was firmly established as early as the fourth century. See “Tabor, Mount,” *ODB* 3:2004.

52 The traditional epithet ὁ Θεολόγος is omitted, but a series of quotations from the writings of the great Cappadocian, introduced directly underneath the portrait, leaves no doubt as to the identity of the figure. For these quotations, see below.

53 Kantakouzenos's correspondence with Paul is published in *Iohannis Cantacuzeni Refutationes duae Prochori Cydonii et Disputatio cum Paulo patriarcha latino epistulis septem tradita*, ed. E. Voordeckers and F. Tinnefeld, CCSG 16 (Turnhout, 1987), 173–239. As the Latin archbishop of Smyrna and afterwards the titular patriarch of Constantinople, Paul was involved in the debate over hesychasm, siding with the opponents of the movement. In 1367, he was sent to Constantinople as the legate of Pope Urban V (1362–1370) in order to discuss the question of union between the two Churches. The Byzantine spokesman in the ensuing debate was the emperor-monk John-Ioasaph. According to the Greek record of the debate, the papal legate was eventually persuaded that an ecumenical council should be held in Constantinople within the next two years. Needless to say, no such council was ever held. See J. Meyendorff, “Projets



**Fig. 3** Transfiguration of Christ, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS gr. 1242, fol. 92v, ca. 1370–1375 (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France)



**Fig. 4** Gregory of Nazianzos, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS gr. 1242, fol. 93r, ca. 1370–1375 (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France)

a direct link between the miniatures and the text. In this epistle Kantakouzenos elaborates on the nature of the divine light seen by the apostles on Mount Tabor, which hesychast theologians interpreted as the uncreated “energy” or “grace” of God. Interwoven with the text are numerous lengthy excerpts from patristic authors. The portrait of Gregory of Nazianzos prefaces, as it were, a series of three quotations from his writings, which were repeatedly cited in hesychast literature.<sup>54</sup>

The series opens with a line from the oration *On Baptism* written directly underneath the portrait and introduced by a golden initial phi. Dwelling upon the traditional equation between baptism and illumination (φωτισμός) or enlightenment, Gregory’s oration enumerates scriptural manifestations of the divine light in a rhetorical tour de force that builds upon the repetition of the word “light” (φῶς).<sup>55</sup> The line picked out by Kantakouzenos pertains to the Transfiguration of Christ: “light was the divinity shown to the disciples on the mountain, a little too strong for their eyes” (φῶς ἡ παραδειχθεῖσα θεότης ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τοῖς μαθηταῖς, μικροῦ στερροτέρα δὲ ὄψεως).<sup>56</sup> The second quotation—again, signaled by a golden initial omicron—comes from Gregory’s oration *On Discipline in Discourse*.<sup>57</sup> The revelation of the divine light, granted to the chosen three of the disciples, is here explained as the sole reason behind the event on Tabor. In a crucial line Gregory posits that Peter, John, and James climbed up the mountain so that Jesus might “shine forth in his [bodily] form, reveal the divinity, and lay bare the one who was hidden in the flesh” (ἵνα τῇ μορφῇ λάμψη καὶ τὴν θεότητα παραδείξῃ καὶ γυμνώσῃ τὸν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ κρυπτόμενον).<sup>58</sup> The theme of the light of Tabor as a manifestation of the Godhead is rehearsed in the third quotation, borrowed from the *First Letter to Kledonios*.<sup>59</sup> Speaking about the reality of the Incarnation, Gregory declares that Christ will

appear again in the Parousia “such as he was seen by, or revealed to, the disciples on the mountain when his divinity overpowered his flesh” (τοιοῦτος δὲ οἶος ὥφθη τοῖς μαθηταῖς ἐν τῷ ὄρει ἢ παρεδείχθη, ὑπερνικώσης τὸ σαρκίον τῆς θεότητος).<sup>60</sup>

Like the quotations, the presence of Gregory’s portrait lends legitimacy and authority to the claims made by Kantakouzenos. In this respect the Paris codex follows the venerable practice of including portraits of authors next to the passages quoted from their works, perhaps the best-known example being the numerous marginal vignettes in the ninth-century manuscript of the *Sacra Parallela* in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS gr. 923).<sup>61</sup> What is unusual, however, is that Gregory is portrayed gesturing to a biblical composition rather than to his own words. As we have seen, the same motif is deployed in the double portrait of Kantakouzenos, in which the monk Ioasaph points to the *Philoxenia* of Abraham, another scriptural narrative. The gesture of pointing to an image establishes a visual link between the two miniatures. Still more importantly, I would argue, it performs a metapictorial function by self-reflexively thematizing the very role assigned to the manuscript’s reduced visual program as an autonomous medium of theological argumentation. In what follows, I shall scrutinize the ways in which the Transfiguration miniature functions as such a visual argument.

### “Let Us Ascend to the Intelligible Mountain of Contemplation”

Images of the Transfiguration from the Medieval West are encountered only exceptionally,<sup>62</sup> whereas the theme remained quite popular in the art of Eastern Christendom of the same time.<sup>63</sup> Since the theophanic vision on Mount

de Concile oecuménique en 1367: Un dialogue inédit entre Jean Cantacuzène et le légat Paul,” *DOP* 14 (1960): 147–77; Nicol, *Reluctant Emperor* (n. 15 above), 149–53.

54 *Iohannis Cantacuzeni Refutationes*, 203–4.

55 See Or. 40.5–6, in *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours* 38–41, ed. C. Moreschini, trans. P. Galloway, SC 358 (Paris, 1990), 204–8.

56 Ibid., 208.

57 Or. 32.18.3–12, in *Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours* 32–37, ed. C. Moreschini, trans. P. Galloway, SC 318 (Paris, 1985), 122.

58 Ibid.

59 Ep. 101.25–29, in *Grégoire de Nazianze, Lettres théologiques*, ed. and trans. P. Galloway, SC 208 (Paris, 1979), 46–48.

60 Ibid., 48.

61 See K. Weitzmann, *The Miniatures of the Sacra Parallela: Parisinus Graecus 923* (Princeton, 1979) and the article by M. Evangelatou above, 113–97.

62 See F. Boespflug, “Sur la Transfiguration dans l’art médiéval d’Occident (IXe–XIVe siècle),” in *Symbolisme et expérience de la lumière dans les grandes religions*, ed. J. Ries and C.-M. Ternes (Turnhout, 2002), 199–223.

63 On the iconography of the Transfiguration in Byzantine art, see G. Millet, *Recherches sur l’iconographie de l’Evangile aux XIVe, XVe et*

Tabor was the central paradigm for the hesychast movement and served as the principal example of any vision of the uncreated light of the Godhead, it has been suggested that a new Late Byzantine iconography of the scene was promoted in hesychast circles.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, in contrast to earlier depictions, Palaiologan images of the Transfiguration offer a much more dramatic and visually exuberant rendition of the scene. The light now becomes an active force; blazing from the body of Christ, it hurls the three disciples down the precipitous landscape. The mandorla of the divine glory acquires a complicated structure formed of superimposed geometrical figures, triangles, squares, diamonds, or circles. The beams of light multiply.

Yet it should be noted that these conspicuous elements of the new iconographic format belong to the common storehouse of Late Byzantine imagery. For instance, the introduction and proliferation of geometrically shaped mandorlas, aureoles, and haloes in Byzantine art can be traced from the last decades of the thirteenth century. They are found not only in images of the Transfiguration but also in scenes depicting Christ's apparitions after his resurrection, as well as in theophanic visions and abstract or symbolic representations of the divinity.<sup>65</sup> Suzy Dufrenne was right in arguing that the Late Byzantine iconography of the Transfiguration cannot be explained by a direct influence of hesychasm.<sup>66</sup> Images of this type appear as early as the late thirteenth

century—in any case, well before the official recognition of Palamas's teachings—and in contexts which do not bespeak any direct link with hesychast circles.<sup>67</sup> To put it somewhat bluntly, there is no such thing as a hesychast iconographic recension of the Metamorphosis *per se*.<sup>68</sup> Without doubt, theologically informed patrons and artists of hesychast inclination could choose to emphasize certain aspects of the standard iconography in order to impart specific meanings, but they would naturally draw on a common repository of traditional pictorial formulae. This was precisely the case with the Paris Transfiguration; the miniature employs motifs that had been already developed by the second half of the fourteenth century, although in a unique and idiosyncratic fashion.<sup>69</sup>

In his groundbreaking study of Late Byzantine book illumination, Belting called the Paris Transfiguration "das klassische Meditationsbild der Hesychasten."<sup>70</sup> His analysis seems to have favored the interpretation of the miniature as a kind of devotional tool. In the Palaiologan

XV<sup>e</sup> siècles d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont Athos (Paris, 1916), 216–31; E. Dinkler, *Das Apsismosaik von S. Apollinare in Classe* (Cologne, 1964), 25–50; K. Weitzmann, "A Metamorphosis Icon or Miniature on Mt. Sinai," *Stavros*, n.s., 20 (1969): 415–21; S. Dufrenne, "La manifestation divine dans l'iconographie byzantine de la Transfiguration," in *Nicée II, 787–1987: Douze siècles d'images religieuses*, ed. F. Boespflug and N. Lossky (Paris, 1987), 185–206; J. Elsner, "Image and Iconoclasm in Byzantium," *Art History* 11, no. 4 (1988): 471–91; J. Miziolek, "Transfiguratio Domini in the Apse at Mount Sinai and the Symbolism of Light," *JWarb* 53 (1990): 42–60; A. Andreopoulos, "The Mosaic of the Transfiguration in St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai: A Discussion of Its Origins," *Byzantion* 72, no. 1 (2002): 9–37; idem, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood, NY, 2005); C. P. Charalampidis, "The Representation of the Uncreated Light (*Lux increata*) in the Byzantine Iconography of the Transfiguration of Christ," *Arte medievale*, n.s., 2, no. 1 (2003): 129–36.

64 See, e.g., Millet, *Recherches*, 227, 230–31; Belting, *Illuminierte Buch* (n. 40 above), 15–16; and most recently Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, esp. 225–42.

65 See V. Mako, "Geometrijski oblici nimbova i mandorli u srednjovekovnoj umetnosti Vizantije, Srbije, Rusije i Bugarske," *Zograf* 21 (1990): 41–59.

66 Dufrenne, "Manifestation divine," 202.

67 See, e.g., the monumental depictions of the Transfiguration in the Holy Apostles at Thessalonike (ca. 1310–14) and the church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Gračanica, Kosovo (ca. 1320), in C. Stephan, *Ein byzantinisches Bildensemble: Die Mosaiken und Fresken der Apostelkirche zu Thessaloniki* (Worms, 1986), 62–65, fig. 6; B. Todić, *Gračanica: Slikarstvo* (Belgrade, 1988), 116–17, fig. 37.

68 Moreover, the hesychast movement does not seem to have generated any significant increase in the popularity of the theme in the visual arts. It may come as a surprise that isolated images of the Transfiguration are extremely rare in Late Byzantium. Apart from cycles of feast images, particularly those of monumental church decoration, examples of the Transfiguration scene are few in number. The evidence provided by the huge corpus of Byzantine icons from the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries suggests that the Metamorphosis was by no means a favorite subject for devotional images.

69 This superb image proved to be influential. It seems that Kantakouzenos's manuscript was known to Cretan icon painters active in Northern Greece, especially on Mount Athos, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In any case, the iconographic format of the Transfiguration miniature was often reproduced in their circle. The closest relatives of the miniature include an icon in the Benaki Museum in Athens (15th century), an icon in the Protaton church at Karyes on Mount Athos (15th century), an icon from a set of feast images painted by Theophanes the Cretan for the Athonite monastery of Stavronikita (1546), and two icons in the Athonite monastery of Pantokrator (ca. 1535–46), both attributed to Theophanes. See *Holy Image, Holy Space: Icons and Frescoes from Greece*, ed. M. Acheimastou-Potamianou (Athens, 1988), fig. 58; *Treasures of Mount Athos*, ed. A. A. Karakatsanis (Thessalonike, 1997), nos. 2.34 and 2.62; S. Papadopoulos et al., *Εἰκόνες Μονῆς Παντοκράτορος* (Mount Athos, 1998), figs. 53 and 58. For further evidence of the prestige enjoyed by the manuscript among later patrons and artists, see V. J. Djurić, "Jedna antiislamska ikona Svetog Save Srpskog i Svetog Simeona Nemanje," *HilZb* 9 (1997): 119–39.

70 Belting, *Illuminierte Buch*, 15.

era, as is well known, panel painting was the most vital and dominant art form; its influence was clearly active in other media. Consequently, pictorial programs of manuscript illumination often contracted to a series of full-page miniatures resembling icons.<sup>71</sup> One is tempted to assume that these large, icon-like illuminations, indeed, icons in book format, were increasingly used as foci of devotional attention. Since the Paris codex perfectly fits this pattern of book production, it is indeed conceivable that the Transfiguration miniature was viewed as such an icon. Yet to understand the miniature solely as a self-contained devotional image is to neglect the context in which it is found and to overlook other possible meanings it may have had for its fourteenth-century audience.

As we have seen, the depiction of the Metamorphosis, coupled with the portrait of Gregory of Nazianzos, is inserted at a strategic point in the text where Kantakouzenos's argument about the uncreated nature of the light of Tabor takes the form of a long series of extracts from the writings of patristic authors. Essentially, the two miniatures serve as a double pictorial gloss on the three authoritative quotations from Gregory listed above. Their relationship with the text is a complex one. Confirming the authenticity of the cited excerpts through his authorial presence, the Cappadocian father is called upon to verify and endorse their interpretation in the hesychast mold advocated by Kantakouzenos. The Transfiguration page, to which Gregory turns his gaze, is further adduced as a visual counterpart of this interpretation. It is much more than an illustration, plain and simple, of the scriptural narrative discussed in the text. Through an inventive manipulation of the elements of the traditional iconography, the miniature sanctions a particular reading of the narrative. As I would suggest, it supplies an autonomous pictorial commentary on the topic of the light of Tabor and thus participates in the exposition of Kantakouzenos's theological argument just as the interpolated quotations do.

In order to retrieve the meaning this captivating image may have had for its Palaiologan audience—which,

despite the lack of conclusive evidence, we can safely identify with the hesychast circle of the ex-emperor—I find it useful to apply a model of inquiry formulated in reception theory. Specifically, I propose to analyze the miniature in relation to what Hans Robert Jauss would term the “horizon of expectations” (*Erwartungshorizont*) of its original viewers.<sup>72</sup> By the “horizon of expectations” I understand historically specific and culturally circumscribed ways of looking at and interpreting images conditioned by collectively shared visual experiences, patterns of thought, iconographic conventions, literary and pictorial topoi, exegetical techniques, and so on. This broadly defined frame of reference would enable the viewer to match the iconographic peculiarities and visual clues deployed in the Paris Transfiguration with a set of familiar motifs and ideas and hence to situate this image within the larger hesychast discourse on the Metamorphosis. In an attempt to retrace the “horizon of expectations” against which the miniature was viewed, I shall examine two related types of evidence, namely, the visual sources on which the miniature is based and a body of hesychast literature—homiletic, doctrinal, devotional, and hagiographic—that is pertinent to the theme of the Metamorphosis. Focusing on the parallel reading of a diverse set of metaphors, similes, and topoi that inform the rhetoric of this body of texts, on the one hand, and the visual rhetoric of the miniature itself, on the other, I would suggest that the Paris Transfiguration lends itself to multiple interpretations. It provides subtle visual clues that could encourage the viewer to engage in the process of mental assimilation of the scriptural theophany with the mystical experience enjoyed by the hesychast visionary. Ultimately, I argue that the miniature may be construed as a kind of pictorial simulacrum that maps different stages of the visionary's mystical journey: his spiritual ascent through prayer and contemplation, his vision of the uncreated light, and his bodily transformation and union with God.

Strictly speaking, the Transfiguration is the only narrative image in the codex. Its anecdotal aspects, however, seem to have been carefully suppressed. The omission of two supplementary episodes showing Christ ascending and descending the mountain, accompanied by the three disciples, is particularly telling. Although their

71 See *ibid.*, 3–17; H. Buchthal, “Toward a History of Palaeologan Illumination,” in *The Place of Book Illumination in Byzantine Art*, ed. K. Weitzmann et al. (Princeton, 1975), 143–77; H. Buchthal and H. Belting, *Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople: An Atelier of Late Byzantine Book Illumination and Calligraphy* (Washington, DC, 1978), 91–93. For the division of labor between scribes and miniaturists in the Palaiologan period, see also R. S. Nelson, *Theodore Hagiopetrites: A Late Byzantine Scribe and Illuminator* (Vienna, 1991), 118–20.

72 See H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982), esp. chap. 1. The concept of *Erwartungshorizont* is itself derived from Husserl, Gadamer, and others. See R. C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1984), *passim*.

inclusion was by no means obligatory, the prologue and the epilogue do feature in the majority of Late Byzantine depictions of the Transfiguration. Kantakouzenos appears to have opted for a more iconic rendition of the scene, one that would better suit its visionary character. Given its position within the codex, the miniature was apparently designed to be viewed in conjunction with the portrait of Gregory on the opposite folio. The two images are engaged in a dialogue, forming, as it were, a kind of diptych (Figs. 3 and 4). Although seated, Gregory is not depicted in his traditional role of inspired author writing at his desk.<sup>73</sup> Instead, lifting his right hand as if to preach, he gazes across the page at the transfigured Christ. His role is essentially twofold. Gregory is portrayed, through his gesture and stance, as an authoritative exegete who delivers his speech on the Transfiguration *ex cathedra*. Still more importantly, he is a witness and participant of the theophanic vision. Actively involved in the process of seeing, Gregory enacts the response of the viewer, encouraging him or her to partake of the visual feast and to meditate on the revelation on the mountain that is being unveiled before their eyes.

Gregory's mediating role is nicely captured in the opening lines of the *Sermon on the Transfiguration* composed by Gregory the Sinaite (ca. 1255/65–d. after 1337), the leading promoter of hesychast prayer in the early fourteenth century.<sup>74</sup> Addressing his disciples, presumably initiates, the great hesychast invites them to climb to the summit of Mount Tabor and share with the apostles the direct vision of Christ's glory: "We who have transformed our mind, as it were, from flesh to spirit, raising our perception from the lowness of the sensible and from the show and superficiality of dispersed being, come, let us ascend to the intelligible mountain of contemplation (τὸ ὄρος τὸ νοητὸν τῆς θεωρίας) and spy out its summit immaterially and directly, and see and hear . . . Let us gaze from nigh at hand, with nothing intervening, upon Jesus as He

flashes forth like lightning on Mount Tabor."<sup>75</sup> The topos of the mountain as a symbol of the contemplative life and mystical ascent is a familiar one, prominently featured in the ascetic discourse.<sup>76</sup> For Gregory of Nyssa, "The knowledge of God (θεολογία) is indeed a steep mountain difficult to climb; the majority of people hardly reach its foot."<sup>77</sup> In an allegorical reading of the biblical imagery of nature, Maximos the Confessor asserts, "Scripture refers to the higher form of the spiritual contemplation of nature as 'hill-country' (ὄρεινήν). Its cultivators are those who have rejected the images derived from sensible objects, and have advanced to a perception of the noetic essences of these objects through the acquisition of the virtues."<sup>78</sup> The author of the *Vita* of St. Romylos of Vidin (d. after 1371), another master of hesychast spirituality, compares the peak of virtues with "a hill on which those who have ascended shine forth like light."<sup>79</sup> In patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration, Mount Tabor is repeatedly interpreted as a paradigm of the spiritual journey of the soul and variously designated as "intelligible mountain," "mountain of virtues," or "mountain of lofty contemplation."<sup>80</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that the depiction of Tabor is given such prominence in the miniature of the Paris codex.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this image is its curiously elongated tapering format. A close inspection of the folio proves that, initially, a wider rectangle had

73 See G. Galavaris, *The Illustrations of the Liturgical Homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus* (Princeton, 1969), 19–23. A close parallel for the portrait type used in our miniature is to be found in a tenth-century manuscript in Venice (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS gr. Z. 70 [= 460], fol. 2v): clad in the bishop's liturgical vestments, Gregory is here portrayed seated on a backless throne under a decorative arch, holding a codex and raising his right hand in a gesture of blessing. See *Oriente Cristiano e Santità: Figure e storie di santi tra Bisanzio e l'Occidente*, ed. S. Gentile (Milan, 1998), no. 4.

74 On Gregory the Sinaite, see E. Hisamatsu, *Gregorios Sinaites als Lehrer des Gebetes* (Altenberge, 1994); A. Rigo, "Gregorio il Sinaïta," in *Théologie byzantine* (n. 6 above), 35–130.

75 Trans. in *Saint Gregory the Sinaite: Discourse on the Transfiguration*, ed. and trans. D. Balfour (Athens, 1982), 20–21.

76 Mountains are, of course, special sites in the geography of Byzantine monasticism. Whether conceived as idyllic *loci amoeni* or wastelands inhabited by demons—and thus conducive to spiritual struggle—they have been preferred monastic retreats since the age of the early desert Fathers. See H.-V. Beyer, "Der 'Heilige Berg' in der byzantinischen Literatur, I. Mit einem Beitrag von Katja Sturm-Schnabl zum *locus amoenus* einer serbischen Herrscherurkunde," *JÖB* 30 (1981): 171–205; A.-M. Talbot, "Les saintes montagnes à Byzance," in *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident: Études comparées*, ed. M. Kaplan (Paris, 2001), 263–75.

77 *De vita Moysis* 2.158, in *Grégoire de Nyse, La Vie de Moïse ou Traité de la perfection en matière de vertu*, ed. and trans. J. Daniélou, SC 185 (Paris, 2000), 206.

78 *Diversa capita ad theologiam et oeconomiam spectantia deque virtute ac vitio* 2.61, in PG 90:1244A. Cited after Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis* (n. 63 above), 194.

79 F. Halkin, "Un ermite des Balkans au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle: La vie grecque inédite de Saint Romylos," *Byzantion* 31 (1961): 142.

80 See J. A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston, NY, 1986), 106–9. See also Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, 193–204.

been scored for the frame, but the miniaturist scaled it down to the present oddly shaped narrow trapezoid. This apparently deliberate format was presumably meant to convey the sense of verticality and upward movement. The elongation of the compositional scheme left a void in the middle section of the image, which the miniaturist filled with a barren mountainous landscape riddled with caves. This type of scenery, characterized by precipitous terraced massifs fragmented into rugged, rocky hills with sparse vegetation, is a hallmark of Late Byzantine landscape imagery. Yet the lofty peaks of the Transfiguration miniature are more than convenient coulisses, stage props against which the sacred figures enact the drama of the divine revelation. I would suggest that they make a very specific reference to Mount Sinai,<sup>81</sup> whose towering rocky massifs of granite seem to have left a lasting imprint on the Byzantine iconographic imagination.<sup>82</sup>

The visual assimilation of Tabor into Sinai is predicated on the typological link between the two mountains as privileged sites of theophanic visions. In exegesis and liturgical poetry the Old Testament manifestations of the divinity on Mount Sinai are interpreted as types of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor.<sup>83</sup> The paral-

lelism Sinai–Tabor is a recurrent theme in hesychast literature. Gregory the Sinaite, for instance, in the *Sermon on the Transfiguration* proclaims, “For type stood to type, in each case, in a relationship of greater perfection; thus was the darkness related to the light, and Horeb [i.e., Sinai]<sup>84</sup> to Tabor.”<sup>85</sup> And further: “Behold: the darkness there [on Sinai] symbolized the light, and the cloud symbolized the cloud of the Spirit here [on Tabor]; the fire symbolized the purification; the trumpet was the loud-speaker of the Word of God; the thunder-claps symbolized the preaching. There were flashes of lightning, while here there was divine illumination surpassing the sun.”<sup>86</sup>

The appearance of Moses and Elijah alongside Christ at the Transfiguration provided another venue for typological exegesis. According to patristic commentators, the two figures symbolize the Old Covenant under the titles of the Law and Prophecy, which was fulfilled with the Incarnation of the Lord.<sup>87</sup> Both Moses and Elijah are the prophets specifically associated with Mount Sinai to whom a direct vision of God “face to face” was denied in the Old Testament,<sup>88</sup> and who were granted this vision in the New Testament on Mount Tabor. The image of Moses ascending into the “divine darkness” of Sinai was traditionally regarded as an exemplum of the true mystic.<sup>89</sup> For the fourteenth-century hesychasts, however, the two prophets were not only archetypal visionaries but also

81 The disproportionately exaggerated Tabor in a few earlier Byzantine depictions of the Transfiguration has recently been interpreted in the same fashion by Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, 196–97. I do not, however, agree with his assertion that, in the ascetic discourse, Sinai “was gradually superseded as the quintessential mountain of ascent by Tabor” (ibid., 196). For the association between the site of the Metamorphosis and other *loca sancta* in a Western, and specifically Franciscan, context, see A. Neff, “Byzantium Westernized, Byzantium Marginalized: Two Icons in the *Supplicationes Variae*,” *Gesta* 38, no. 1 (1999): 82–87.

82 The type of rocky landscape makes its first appearance in illuminated manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries, perhaps as an allusion to Mount Sinai. See, e.g., the landscape imagery in the Paris Gregory of ca. 880–83 (Bibliothèque Nationale, MS gr. 510), the Leo Bible of ca. 930–40 (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Reg. gr. I B), and the Paris Psalter of ca. 950–75 (Bibliothèque Nationale, MS gr. 139), in L. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge, 1999), figs. 14, 18–19, 23, 26, 35, 44; *Die Bibel des Patricius Leo: Codex Reginensis Graecus I B*, ed. S. Dufrenne and P. Canart (Zurich, 1988), fols. 46v, 155v, 461v; H. Buchthal, *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter: A Study in Middle Byzantine Painting* (London, 1938), figs. 2, 10, 12.

83 See McGuckin, *Transfiguration of Christ*, 100–3 et passim. For liturgical poetry, see, e.g., two *kanones*, one by Kosmas the Hymnographer and the other by John of Damascus, sung on the Feast of the Transfiguration (6 August), in *The Festal Menaion*, trans. Mother Mary and K. Ware (London, 1984), 482–96. The typological association of the two theophanic mountains underlies the sixth-century mosaic program in the sanctuary of the *katholikon* of St. Catherine’s monastery on Mount Sinai. See K. Weitzmann in G. H. Forsyth et al., *The Monastery of Saint*

*Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian* (Ann Arbor, 1973), 11–16, and the references cited in note 63.

84 The distinction between Sinai and Horeb had been blurred long before the Late Byzantine period. See P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d’Orient: Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe* (Paris, 1985), 308–10. On pilgrimage to Sinai/Horeb in Byzantium, see A. Külzer, *Peregrinatio graeca in Terram Sanctam: Studien zu Pilgerführern und Reisebeschreibungen über Syrien, Palästina und den Sinai aus byzantinischer und metabyzantinischer Zeit* (Frankfurt a. M., 1994), esp. 260–66.

85 Trans. Balfour, *Discourse on the Transfiguration* (n. 75 above), 22–23.

86 Ibid., 26–27.

87 See McGuckin, *Transfiguration of Christ* (n. 80 above), 116–17; Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis* (n. 63 above), 111–14.

88 See, e.g., Exod. 33:20–23 and 1 Kings 19:8–13. Both texts are included among the Old Testament lessons for the Feast of the Transfiguration. See *Festal Menaion* (n. 82 above), 472–74.

89 Moses was considered the exemplary mystic and mystagogue already by Philo of Alexandria. In Christian tradition this line of exegesis was taken up and fully elaborated in Gregory of Nyssa’s much-read *De vita Moysis*. See Jean Daniélou’s introduction to *Grégoire de Nyse, La Vie de Moïse*, 7–38. See also J. Elsner, “The Viewer and the Vision: The Case of the Sinai Apse,” *Art History* 17, no. 1 (1994): 81–102.

models of ascetic monasticism. The life of Elijah in particular seems to have perfectly embodied the hagiographic topos of the solitary hesychast who wanders from one “desert” to another practicing a highly individualized form of monastic life.<sup>90</sup> Gregory Palamas goes so far as to suggest that the posture assumed by Elijah when he went up to the top of Carmel and “bowed himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees” (1 Kings 18:42) mirrors the usual attitude of the hesychast monk during prayer, in which the monk rests his beard on the chest and focuses his gaze on the center of his body, in the region of the navel.<sup>91</sup> In a similar vein, Gregory the Sinaite describes the theophanic vision which Elijah experienced on Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19:8–13) in purely hesychast terms: “He saw a great strong wind such as crushes those initiated into hesychastic prayer, and an earthquake of the heart, and a fire of power which purifies; and finally a light breath of light, in which God becomes superessentially intelligible to us in states of participation.”<sup>92</sup>

90 The hagiographic topos of the vagabond monk reflects the actual practice of ἰδιορρυθμία, meaning “following one’s own devices,” that became widespread in the Palaiologan era. Violating the traditional monastic *stabilitas loci*, the idiorhythmic regime allowed monks not only to travel, but also to acquire personal property and even to earn income through their labor. See “Idiorhythmic Monasticism,” *ODB* 2:981–82; D. M. Nicol, “*Instabilitas Loci*: The Wanderlust of Late Byzantine Monks,” in *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford, 1985), 193–202. The increasing popularity in Late Byzantium of icons depicting the prophet Elijah in the wilderness should be related, perhaps, to the general revival of monasticism brought about by the hesychast movement. See Y. Piatnitsky in *Sinai, Byzantium, Russia: Orthodox Art from the Sixth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. idem et al. (London, 2000), 201–202. For a contemporary *ekphrasis* of an icon of the prophet Elijah, see *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, ed. E. Miller, 2 vols. (Paris, 1855–57), 1:46–50. See also T. Baseu-Barabas, “Die Speisung des Elias durch den Raben: Ein Epigramm des Manuel Philes als Zeugnis für ein verschollenes Kunstwerk,” *JÖB* 43 (1993): 233–40.

91 *Triad* 1.2.10, in Grégoire Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes*, ed. and trans. J. Meyendorff, 2 vols. (Louvain, 1959), 1:92–94. Palamas often mentions the prophet Elijah as an exemplum for his fellow hesychasts. See, e.g., *Triad* 1.3.24, in *ibid.*, 160–62. For the posture of the hesychast monk while praying, see, e.g., the following passage from Pseudo-Symeon: “Then sit in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you. Close the door, and withdraw your intellect from everything worthless and transient. Rest your beard on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the center of your belly or your navel. Restrain the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily, and search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside.” In Hausherr, *Méthode d’oraison* (n. 5 above), 164; trans. in “The Three Methods of Prayer,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, ed. and trans. G. E. H. Palmer et al., 4 vols. (London, 1979–95), 4:72–73.

92 *Discourse on the Transfiguration* (n. 75 above), 24–25.

A telltale iconographic element of the Paris miniature further strengthens the parallelism between Sinai and Tabor. Being unable to endure the blinding brightness of the transfigured Lord, the apostles John and James are shown falling headlong down the mountain, literally thrown out of their sandals.<sup>93</sup> This seemingly “naturalistic” detail is not based on the Gospel accounts. Rather it is introduced as an iconographic marker that sanctions a particular interpretation of the narrative. The motif of losing one’s sandals would have been understood as an allusion to the episode of the Burning Bush when God commanded Moses to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground (Exodus 3:2–5). Gesturing toward the *exemplum Moysis*, the detail of the barefoot apostles serves to evoke Sinai while at the same time proclaiming the sacredness of Tabor.<sup>94</sup>

The typological link between the two mountains thus allowed for a pictorial assimilation in which images themselves allegorize scriptural narratives. In this respect the Paris Transfiguration is not without precedent in Byzantine art. A case in point is the representation of the theophany on Sinai related in Exodus 19:16: “On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.” Miniatures illustrating these verses are found in the closely related group of illuminated Octateuchs, produced in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In the Vatican manuscript of ca. 1050–1075 (MS gr. 747) the miniature is arranged in two registers (fol. 98r, Fig. 5).<sup>95</sup> In the upper part a wide beam of dazzling light descends from a segment of heaven upon Mount Sinai covered by a cloud, from which two sounding trumpets protrude. A group of frightened Israelites in agitated postures, overcome by dread, is depicted at the foot of the mountain. The whole iconographic scheme, as the viewer would certainly not fail to notice, is couched in the familiar imagery of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

93 Although unusual, this detail is by no means unique to the Paris codex. See, e.g., the depiction of the Transfiguration in the late fourteenth-century Serbian Psalter in Munich in *Der Serbische Psalter: Faksimile-Ausgabe des Cod. Slav. 4 der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München*, ed. H. Belting, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1983), 2: fol. 116v.

94 I am indebted to Kevin Kalish for drawing my attention to this detail.

95 K. Weitzmann and M. Bernabò, *The Byzantine Octateuchs*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1999), 1:172–73; 2: fig. 738.



**Fig. 5**

Theophany on Mount Sinai, detail of Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS gr. 747, fol. 98r, ca. 1050–1075 (photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)

Closely related to the topos of the mountain is another popular metaphor of mystical ascent in the Byzantine ascetic tradition—the ladder. Its wide currency in the Middle Ages was primarily due to a tremendously influential devotional treatise, known as *The Heavenly Ladder*, composed by John Klimax (d. ca. 650), *hegoumenos* of the monastery on Mount Sinai.<sup>96</sup> The treatise was one of

the principal sources of the fourteenth-century hesychast revival. Recapitulating the doctrine and practice of early

<sup>96</sup> S. Giovanni Climaco, *Scala Paradisi*, ed. and trans. P. Trevisan, 2 vols. (Turin, 1941). The original Greek title of the treatise was most likely Πλάκες πνευματικάι, or *Spiritual Tablets*, which would be a direct reference to the Tablets of the Law received by Moses and hence uniquely appropriate for the place of its composition. See J. Duffy,

“Embellishing the Steps: Elements of Presentation and Style in *The Heavenly Ladder* of John Climacus,” *DOP* 53 (1999): 5–6. The overarching figure of Moses dominates the imagery of the treatise. In a letter included in the prefatory material, John, *hegoumenos* of Raithou, entreats his friend, John Klimax, to become a New Moses. As one who has ascended the mountain and acquired the vision of God, Klimax is asked to provide a set of divine tablets for the instruction of the New Israelites who have renounced the world and reached the higher calling of monasticism. See *Scala Paradisi*, 1:31. For the reception of the treatise in Byzantium, see especially D. Bogdanović, *Jovan Lestvičnik u vizantijskoj i staroj srpskoj književnosti* (Belgrade, 1968).



**Fig. 6**

Jacob's dream of the mountain-ladder, Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum, MS W. 733, fol. 29r, ca. 1300 (photo: The Walters Art Museum)

Eastern monasticism, it gives a survey of virtues and vices structured around the image of a ladder with thirty rungs that details the spiritual progression of the soul toward perfection and union with God. In the ascetic discourse, the mountain and the ladder seem to have been virtually interchangeable.<sup>97</sup> A striking example of the conflation of the two metaphors is found in the marginal psalter of ca. 1300, now in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore

<sup>97</sup> To these two one should add the corresponding metaphor of the pillar. See S. Ashbrook Harvey, "The Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder," *VChr* 42 (1988): 376–94.

(MS W. 733).<sup>98</sup> In this manuscript Psalm 67 is illustrated with the depiction of a dream (fol. 29r, Fig. 6).<sup>99</sup> In the *bas de page* a male figure, labeled by what appears to be

<sup>98</sup> D. E. Miner, "The 'Monastic' Psalter of the Walters Art Gallery," in *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.*, ed. K. Weitzmann et al. (Princeton, 1955), 232–53; A. Cutler, "The Marginal Psalter in the Walters Art Gallery: A Reconsideration," *JWalt* 35 (1977): 36–61; *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, cat. no. 160 (J. Lowden); J. C. Anderson, "The State of the Walters' Marginal Psalter and Its Implications for Art History," *JWalt* 62 (2004): 35–44.

<sup>99</sup> For a good color illustration, see *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, 275.

a later hand as Jacob, is portrayed sleeping, accompanied by an angel. The subject of his dream occupies the right margin. It is a lofty mountain, surmounted by a medallion of the Virgin with Christ Child upon which a beam of light descends. The image illustrates verses 15–16: “O mighty mountain, mountain of Bashan; O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan! Why look you with envy, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount which God desired for his abode, yea, where the Lord will dwell forever?” Quite unexpectedly, the appended inscription written by the same later hand identifies this mount of God’s abode depicted in the margin as “The Ladder” (Ἡ Κλίμαξ), apparently referring to the ladder of Jacob’s dream, set up between heaven and earth (Genesis 28:12–17).<sup>100</sup> Seemingly incorrect, the unusual labels of the Walters manuscript present a highly inventive interpretation of the image found in other marginal psalters, for instance, in the closely related Kiev Psalter of 1397 (Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, MS F6, fol. 88v), in which the prophet Daniel rather than Jacob is represented beholding the mountain of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Daniel 2:31–35).<sup>101</sup>

If the lofty Tabor of the Transfiguration miniature represents, indeed, the mountain-ladder of mystical ascent, then the actions and gestures of the three apostles should be understood as metaphors for the processes of spiritual transformation and vision experienced by the hesychast mystic. This suggestion might not appear too far-fetched if we compare the miniature with what is most likely another product of the same painter or workshop responsible for the illumination of Kantakouzenos’s codex. In May 1371, a copy of *The Heavenly Ladder* of John Klimax was completed by Ioasaph, the scribe who enjoyed the patronage of the ex-emperor, at the Hodegon monastery in Constantinople.<sup>102</sup> The manuscript, which is now in the library of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (MS 134), is prefaced by a full-page miniature of the Heavenly Ladder (fol. 13v, Fig. 7).<sup>103</sup> The miniature exemplifies all the elements of the traditional iconogra-

phy.<sup>104</sup> The ladder is shown extending diagonally across the picture plane. Accompanied by a group of monks, the author, John Klimax, stands at its foot holding a scroll and his pastoral staff. Encouraged by angels and beset by demons, another group of monks is depicted climbing the ladder. Some of them have lost their footing and fall into the cave below. Emerging from a segment of heaven in the upper right corner, Christ assists the topmost monk as he approaches his goal.

The frontispiece of the Ann Arbor Klimax displays an array of gestures and bodily types strikingly similar to those seen in the Transfiguration miniature in the Paris codex. Ascending and plummeting monks in contorted postures closely resemble the awe-struck apostles. The same compact bodies with elongated torsos and stocky thighs, wrapped in whirling draperies, make the same violent gestures extending their arms and bending their legs in forceful diagonal movements. Stylistic affinities between the two manuscripts, as well as the fact that both were written by the same scribe around the same time, have led scholars to conclude that the painter or workshop which Kantakouzenos entrusted with the decoration of the manuscript of his theological works also illuminated the Ann Arbor Klimax.<sup>105</sup> It may be objected that the similarities to which I have pointed are, if not purely accidental, reflective of a standard workshop practice, namely, that the illuminators simply resorted to a common set of models in order to render quite different subjects. Without wanting to force the analogy further by equating the bedazzled apostles falling headlong with the monks pitched into Hell by demons, I would suggest that the two miniatures bear more than a superficial resemblance. They both feature individuals engaged in processes of spiritual struggle and inner transformation moving along an axis—be it the mountain or the ladder—suggestive of mystical ascent. Confronted with the task of translating their experience into images, the illuminators employed similar poses, gestures, and figural types.

As a matter of fact, the bodily rhetoric that underlies the portrayal of Peter, John, and James in the Paris

<sup>100</sup> In fact, the majority of the identifying inscriptions in the Walters manuscript seem to have been added at a later date. See Anderson, “State,” esp. 36–37.

<sup>101</sup> For the Kiev Psalter, see G. Vzdornov, *Issledovanie o Kievskoi Psal'tiri*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1978), 1:123; 2: fol. 88v.

<sup>102</sup> A. W. Carr, “Two Manuscripts by Joasaph in the United States,” *ArtB* 63, no. 2 (1981): 182–90.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 1.

<sup>104</sup> See J. R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus* (Princeton, 1954), esp. 10–19.

<sup>105</sup> Other manuscripts attributed to the same atelier include a lectionary in the Koutloumousiou monastery on Mount Athos (MS 62), a Gospels manuscript in the Vatican (MS gr. 1160), and a manuscript of the Akathistos Hymn in the State Historical Museum in Moscow (MS Syn. gr. 429). See Buchthal, “Palaeologan Illumination” (n. 71 above), 165–75; Carr, “Two Manuscripts,” 185–90.



**Fig. 7**  
Heavenly Ladder, Ann Arbor,  
University of Michigan, MS  
134, fol. 13v, 1371 (photo:  
Special Collections Library,  
University of Michigan)

codex is closely matched by the descriptions of ecstatic rapture found in Byzantine devotional texts. An excerpt from the *Theological, Gnostic, and Practical Chapters* of Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022) may illustrate the point: “He who has within himself the light of the all-holy Spirit, being unable to bear the sight of it, falls prostrate on the ground, and cries out and shouts in amazement and great fear, as if he sees and experiences something beyond nature, reason, and understanding. He becomes like a man whose entrails are touched by fire; being scorched with flame and unable to bear its burning, he becomes like one in ecstasy (ὕπάρχει ὥσπερ

ἐξεστηκώς).”<sup>106</sup> Symeon was one of the great luminaries of the Byzantine monastic tradition whose highly individualistic mysticism of light exerted a decisive influence on the hesychast movement.<sup>107</sup> His writings abound in descriptions of his personal encounter with the divinity. In his *Catechetical Discourses*, for instance, Symeon relates

<sup>106</sup> Cap. 3.21, in *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, Chapitres théologiques, gnostiques et pratiques*, ed. and trans. J. Darrouzès, SC 51 (Paris, 1957), 132.

<sup>107</sup> On Symeon the New Theologian and his influence on hesychasm, see most recently H. Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford, 2000), esp. 275–87.

how, having returned to his cell after supper, he started to recite the *Trisagion* prayer: "At once I was moved to tears and desire for God so much that I am unable to describe the joy and delight which I felt at that moment. Immediately I fell prostrate on the ground and saw, behold, a great light that was spiritually (νοερῶς) shining on me, taking hold of my entire mind and soul, so that I was struck with amazement at the unexpected wonder and was as if in ecstasy."<sup>108</sup> The patrons and painters of the Palaiologan era seem to have become increasingly preoccupied with possibilities of translating mystical and visionary experiences of this kind into an eloquent visual language of bodily gestures. Surviving examples—to be sure, they are few in number—provide instructive comparanda for the imagery of the Paris Transfiguration.

The first example I shall cite is a miniature from the manuscript of the New Testament in Athens (National Library of Greece, MS 150), dated to the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>109</sup> The miniature depicts John the Evangelist dictating his Gospel to the scribe Prochoros on the island of Patmos (fol. 166v, Fig. 8).<sup>110</sup> If its basic iconographic format is fairly typical, the agitated figure of the aged evangelist, his distorted *contrapposto*, and the flying drape of his *himation* communicate the idea of the divinely inspired author in a rather peculiar way.<sup>111</sup> The most unusual feature of the miniature is the quadrilateral aureole of light, pouring from a segment of heaven with the Hand of God and enveloping the Evangelist's body. This outstanding image inevitably brings to mind the flood of divine radiance described in the accounts of ecstatic transport in Byzantine devotional literature.<sup>112</sup>

Roughly contemporary with the Athens manuscript is a codex from the State Historical Museum in Moscow

(MS Syn. gr. 407) containing the four Gospels, Acts and Epistles, Apocalypse, Psalter, and ten biblical Odes.<sup>113</sup> It is a small book written in elegant "humanistic" script, presumably commissioned by a private patron. Its cycle of full-page miniatures consists mostly of portraits of biblical authors prefacing their works. Again, a depiction of John the Evangelist is of relevance for the present discussion. Unlike the two other portraits of John at the beginning of his Gospel and Epistles, which conform to the codified iconography of the inspired scribe, his image in the frontispiece of the Apocalypse is a veritable "icon" of a paradigmatic visionary (fol. 388v, Fig. 9).<sup>114</sup> Placed on top of a dwarfed rocky mountain suggestive of Patmos, his upright body wrapped in billowing garments shivers in frenzy, his face is contorted, and his brow wrinkles as he blinks at the divine light emanating from a segment of heaven. The same kind of gestural rhetoric informs the portrait of the prophet Habakkuk in this manuscript (fol. 502v, Fig. 10), inserted at the beginning of his Ode (Habakkuk 3:2–19).<sup>115</sup> The young prophet assumes a stooping posture of unprecedented fervor and agitation. The sense of rapture and visionary exaltation, conveyed through violent movements, is enhanced by the square format of the miniature, as if the figure were caged within the picture frame. Habakkuk's agitated stance and the characteristic gesture of his right hand, pointing to his ear, refer to the verse: "I hear, and my body trembles, my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones, my steps totter beneath me" (Habakkuk 3:16).<sup>116</sup> Yet the voice of the Lord heard by the prophet has been complemented, or even subsumed, by the effulgence of blue light glowing from the upper right-hand corner of the image.

For the fourteenth-century viewer familiar with the hesychast doctrine, this blue radiance that illuminates the visionaries of the Athens and Moscow manuscripts and blinds the apostles in the Paris Transfiguration is nothing less than the *lux increata* of the Godhead, the very energy of the divinity bestowed upon those who

108 Cat. 16.78–86, in *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, Catéchèses*, ed. B. Krivochéine, trans. J. Paramelle, SC 104 (Paris, 1963), 244.

109 A. Maraba-Chatzenikolaou and Ch. Touphex-Paschou, *Κατάλογος Μικρογραφιών Βυζαντινών Χειρογράφων τῆς Ἐθνικῆς Βιβλιοθήκης τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1985), 2: no. 41.

110 Ibid., fig. 359. On the iconography of John the Evangelist and Prochoros on Patmos, see H. Buchthal, "A Byzantine Miniature of the Fourth Evangelist and Its Relatives," *DOP* 15 (1961): 127–39; R. S. Nelson, *The Iconography of Preface and Miniature in the Byzantine Gospel Book* (New York, 1980), 86–87; I. Spatharakis, *The Left-Handed Evangelist: A Contribution to Palaeologan Iconography* (London, 1988), passim.

111 The evangelist's reaction is all the more remarkable when compared with the comportment of the detached Prochoros, who essentially functions as an Albertian choric figure directly addressing the viewer. For the tradition of the inspired evangelist, see C. Nordenfalk, "Der inspirierte Evangelist," *WJGK* 36 (1983): 175–90.

112 See, e.g., Cat. 22.90–91, in *Catéchèses* (n. 108 above), 372.

113 M. V. Alpatoff, "A Byzantine Illuminated Manuscript of the Palaeologue Epoch in Moscow," *ArtB* 12.3 (1930): 207–18; O. S. Popova, "Novyi Zavet s Psaltir'iu: grecheskii kodeks pervoi poloviny XIV v. iz Sinodal'noi biblioteki (Gr. 407)," *VizVrem* 54 (1993): 127–39.

114 Alpatoff, "Byzantine Illuminated Manuscript," fig. 3.

115 For a good color illustration, see V. N. Lazarev, *Istoriia vizantiiskoi zhivopisi*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1986), 2: fig. 533.

116 For an overview of the prophet's iconography in Byzantium, see C. Walter, "The Iconography of the Prophet Habakkuk," *REB* 47 (1989): 251–60.



**Fig. 8**

John the Evangelist and Prochoros on the island of Patmos, Athens, National Library of Greece, MS 150, fol. 166v, mid-14th century (photo: Christos Kolotouros)

have reached the peak of virtue and stand at the summit of the mountain of contemplation.<sup>117</sup> This light above all lights, which is perceived with the eyes of the intellect, not with bodily eyes, can be properly described only by using

<sup>117</sup> For the mystique of light in hesychasm, see especially E. von Ivánka, "Zur hesychastischen Lichtvision," *Kairos* 13.2 (1971): 81–95; H.-V. Beyer, "Die Lichtlehre der Mönche des vierzehnten und des vierten Jahrhunderts, erörtert am Beispiel des Gregorios Sinaïtes, des Euagrios Pontikos und des Ps.-Makarios/Symeon," *JÖB* 31.2 (1981): 473–512.

the negative language of apophatic theology. To borrow a phrase from Symeon the New Theologian, it is "ineffable, unspeakable, without quality, without quantity, imageless, immaterial, formless" (ἄφραστον, ἀνεκλάλητον, ἄποιον, ἄποσον, ἀνίδεον, ἄϋλον, ἀσχημάτιστον).<sup>118</sup> The Paris miniature thus embodies a paradox: it makes us

<sup>118</sup> *Eth.* 11.175–76, in *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien, Traités théologiques et éthiques*, ed. and trans. J. Darrouzès, SC 129 (Paris, 1966) 342.



**Fig. 9**

John the Evangelist on the island of Patmos, Moscow, State Historical Museum, MS Syn. gr. 407, fol. 388v, mid-14th century (after V. N. Lazarev, *Istoriia vizantiiskoi zhivopisi*, 2 vols. [Moscow, 1986], 2: fig. 527)

see what transcends the realm of sensory perception and represents what is ultimately beyond the grasp of representation. In order to show the invisible by means of the visible, the painter resorted to a common repertory of abstract diagrammatic imagery. He rendered the divine light blazing from the body of Christ as a geometrically shaped blue mandorla encircled with a corona of radiating beams. Surpassing anything seen in the Byzantine art of the period, this extraordinarily grandiose configuration expands its overpowering brightness to the entire picture plane.<sup>119</sup>

In purely stylistic terms, the miniature is notable for

<sup>119</sup> The superb pictorial articulation of the effect of blinding light in the miniature recalls the following epigram on an image of the Metamorphosis by Manuel Philes (*Manuelis Philae Carmina* [n. 90 above], 1:7):

its luminosity. The color scheme reduced to a range of blue, grey, and other tones, harmonized with gold, gives the impression that the whole scene is immersed in a serene blue light. The application of delicate highlights—especially on garments, which appear to sparkle—reveals a consistent effort on the part of the painter to give tangible form to radiance. However, contrary to what one would expect, the body of Christ is not the source of illumination in the image. As was the rule in Palaiologan painting, the illusion of volume and spatial depth is achieved by a conventional, if not arbitrary, distribution of light and

Just as the shadow is inseparable from the body  
so is the effusion of light from Tabor even in this image.  
Therefore, spectator, even if your spiritual eyes are sound,  
stand at a distance while you are casting your gaze.



**Fig. 10**  
Prophet Habakkuk, Moscow, State  
Historical Museum, MS Syn. gr. 407, fol.  
502v, mid-14th century (after Lazarev,  
*Istoriia vizantiiskoi zhivopisi*, 2: fig. 533)

shade, with the result that different areas of the image seem to receive illumination from different sources. As a means of representation predicated on the notion of mimesis, light is a corporeal, sensory phenomenon. Spun over bodies, draperies, and landscape, it is only a reflection, or mirror image, of the divine light emanating from the body of Christ.<sup>120</sup>

Two seemingly incompatible visual languages, one abstract and the other figural, are integrated into a coherent pictorial system with exceptional inventiveness. The

postures and silhouettes of the human participants and their directional movements, as well as the slopes and outlines of the rocky landscape, all seem to conform to the abstract geometric patterning of the mandorla, as if a hidden network of projecting lines, circles, ellipses, and curves had been superimposed over the picture plane. The mandorla thus generates a higher order of representation in the image. It provides a syntax, or underlying diagram, for the rendition of figural elements. The whole scene seems to have been elevated from the disharmony of temporal imperfection into a timeless perfection of divine order.<sup>121</sup>

**120** In the words of Pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite in *De caelesti hierarchia* 1.3, “material lights are images of immaterial illumination” (τῆς αὐτοῦ φωτοδοσίας εἰκόνα τὰ ὕλικά φῶτα): *Corpus Dionysiacum*, vol. 2, *De caelesti hierarchia*, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, *De mystica theologia*, *Epistulae*, ed. G. Heil and A. M. Ritter (Berlin, 1991), 9.

**121** For the use and meaning of diagrammatic imagery in medieval art, see M. H. Caviness, “Images of Divine Order and the Third Mode of Seeing,” *Gesta* 22, no. 2 (1983): 99–120. The representational mode at work in

I would argue that this transformation of representational space is ultimately rooted in the eschatological interpretation of the theophanic vision on Mount Tabor. It marks a shift not only beyond the physical and perceptual, but also toward the future—the Kingdom of God and the age to come. According to patristic commentaries reiterated in hesychast literature, the Metamorphosis not only fulfills the apparitions of God in the Old Testament but also anticipates the Parousia at the end of time.<sup>122</sup> The uncreated light which blazed from the body of Christ is often described in terms that imply its eschatological character: Gregory Palamas, for instance, calls it “a prelude (προοίμιον) to the glory of

the Transfiguration miniature could also be elucidated under the rubric of ornamentality, as this term is defined and used by Jean-Claude Bonne. See especially his essays “De l’ornement dans l’art médiéval (VIIe–XIIe siècle): Le modèle insulaire,” in *L’image: Fonctions et usages des images dans l’Occident médiéval*, ed. J. Baschet and J.-C. Schmitt (Paris, 1996), 207–40; and “De l’ornement à l’ornementalité: La mosaïque absidiale de San Clemente de Rome,” in *Le rôle de l’ornement dans la peinture murale du Moyen Âge*, ed. J. Ottaway (Poitiers, 1997), 103–18. Rather than as a marginal aspect synonymous with the notion of decoration, Bonne sees ornamentality as an organizing principle and, moreover, an aesthetic process that runs through every level of a medieval image—be it material, representational, or semantic. In his own words, “En mettant en avant certaines des propriétés sensibles du champ et des marques à l’intérieur même de l’image, elle [i.e. l’ornementalité] fonctionne comme un *intensif* (un peu comme un adverbe, un comparatif, ou bien une intonation): elle ne représente rien d’abord, elle *se fait éprouver* et, du même mouvement, qualifie ou *modalise différemment* ce qu’elle affecte d’un indice esthétique spécifique par rapport à d’autres—car, comme dans tout ensemble organisé, il n’y a de modalité ornementale que différentielle” (“De l’ornement à l’ornementalité,” 106).

<sup>122</sup> See McGuckin, *Transfiguration of Christ* (n. 80 above), 120–25. Eschatological symbolism is such a pervasive theme in the exegesis of the Transfiguration that commentators sometimes indulge in quite extravagant numerological speculations in order to evince it. In his Sermon 34, for instance, Palamas argues that the eschatological meaning of the Metamorphosis is virtually encoded in the very number of persons participating in or witnessing the theophany: “They were eight on the mountain, but only six of them were visible. These three, Peter, James and John, came up with Jesus, and there they saw Moses and Elijah conversing with him, which makes six. But entirely invisible, the Father and the Holy Spirit were also there with the Lord . . . Thus the six are eight” (PG 151:425C). A symbol of the fulfillment of the Creation, the number eight is the eschatological number par excellence. As Palamas explains further, “The great vision of the light of the Lord’s Transfiguration represents the mystery of the eighth day, that is, the mystery of the age to come, which follows after the sabbatical rest (κατάπαυσις) of the world created in six days” (ibid., 428B). The Byzantines were apparently very fond of this type of numerological reading. In an epigram on the Transfiguration, Christopher Mitylenaios declares that the three apostles symbolize the three *hypostaseis* of the Godhead, whereas the two prophets stand for the divine and human natures of Christ. See *Die Gedichte des Christophoros Mitylenaios* (n. 41 above), no. 25, 14–15.

Christ in his Second Coming.”<sup>123</sup> The proleptic nature of the Transfiguration is of paramount importance for hesychast spirituality. If the Taboric light is, indeed, the very reality of eternal illumination that will be granted to the righteous in the future, then the hesychast mystic who has acquired the vision of this light through prayer and contemplation partakes of the eschatological reality in the present time.<sup>124</sup> To use Pauline terminology, he sees directly, “face to face,” even in this life.

### “What We Once Were and What We Shall Become”

The ultimate *visio Dei* has a profoundly transformational character. Inasmuch as he sees light, the visionary becomes himself filled with light, thus obtaining a new luminous body. Byzantine theologians understood this bodily transformation as an aspect of *θέωσις*, meaning “deification” or rather “becoming God-like.” According to the anonymous Syrian father whose writings circulated among the fourteenth-century hesychasts under the name of Makarios the Great, “As the body of the Lord was glorified when he climbed the mount and was transfigured into the divine glory and into infinite light, so also the bodies of the saints are glorified and shine like lightning.”<sup>125</sup> The transformation of the body into a vessel of illumination is a recurrent topos in hesychast hagiographic texts. The biographers of the Athonite hermit Maximos Kausokalybites (d. after 1363) recount an incident in which a monk saw the hermit completely transfigured with the divine light shining around him. When Maximos invited him to come closer, the monk could not move because he was blinded by the radiance emanating from the hermit’s body.<sup>126</sup> Another hesychast

<sup>123</sup> *Triad* 1.3.43, in *Défense des saints hésychastes* (n. 91 above), 1:205. Palamas is here paraphrasing the exegetical homily *In Psalmum XLIV* by Basil the Great. See PG 29:400D.

<sup>124</sup> See Meyendorff, *Introduction* (n. 1 above), 266–69.

<sup>125</sup> *Hom. spir.* 15.38, trans. in Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, trans. G. A. Maloney (New York, 1992), 122.

<sup>126</sup> F. Halkin, “Deux vies de S. Maxime le Kausokalybe ermite au Mont Athos (XIVe s.),” *AB* 54 (1936): 48 and 95. Sometimes the *Vitae* of Maximos speak about the hermit’s bodily transformation by using

saint of the same generation, Romylos of Vidin, is said in his *Vita* to have had a radiant body in the state of possession by God.<sup>127</sup> Two fellow ascetics and masters of hesychast prayer, Kallistos (d. 1397) and Ignatios Xanthopoulos (d. after 1423), were also invested with luminescent countenance. As Symeon, archbishop of Thessalonike (1416/17–1429), reports, “They received the pledge [of the divine light] even in this life, being purified by contemplation and works, and like the apostles they enjoyed the divine illumination on the mountain. And many have given clear evidence that the two of them appeared like Stephen,<sup>128</sup> with their faces flashing forth like lightning, since grace was poured out not only in their hearts but also upon their faces. So, as those who saw them have testified, like the great Moses,<sup>129</sup> they were as radiant as the sun in their physical appearance.”<sup>130</sup>

Central to the hesychast dialectic of vision and deification, the notion of bodily transformation is intimately related to the metaphor of the body as garment. This metaphor, I believe, furnishes a link between the double portrait of John–Ioasaph Kantakouzenos and the theme of the Metamorphosis. Rich in associations with fall and redemption, the imagery of the body is frequently couched in the metaphors of vesture, clothing, and denudement. “Before the transgression,” writes Palamas, “Adam too participated in this divine illumination and radiance, and as he was truly clothed in a garment of glory (στολήν ἡμφιεσμένος δόξης), he was not naked.”<sup>131</sup> The reassumption of the light-filled and glorious clothes, which Adam put off in disobeying God, is accomplished through the Incarnation of Christ. As Palamas states, “Now that our nature has been stripped of this divine illumination and

radiance as a result of the transgression, the Word of God has taken pity on our disgrace and in his compassion has assumed our nature and has manifested it again to his chosen disciples, clothed more remarkably on Tabor. He indicated what we once were and what we shall become through him in the future age.”<sup>132</sup>

This intricate set of ideas about the Taboric light, body as garment, redemption, and glory of the age to come is eloquently encapsulated in the iconography of a sumptuous embroidered robe, now in the Vatican. Commonly referred to as the Dalmatic of Charlemagne, it is a Byzantine *sakkos*, an outer garment worn by the bishop during the liturgy, dated to the fourteenth century (Figs. 11 and 12).<sup>133</sup> The decorative program of the *sakkos* features the Transfiguration of Christ on the back, the Communion of the Apostles under the species of bread and wine on the short sleeves, and a majestic vision of Christ in Glory on the front. Clearly borrowing from the iconography of the Last Judgment, the front image of the *sakkos* depicts what Gabriel Millet named “L’Appel des Élus” at the end of time:<sup>134</sup> enthroned in a circle, Christ is surrounded by the supplicatory figures of the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist, the four apocalyptic beasts, various choirs of saints, and a host of angels with the *symbola* of the Passion.<sup>135</sup> The appended figures of the Good Thief and Abraham with the souls of the righteous below tinge the scene with connotations of Paradise. Although the multifarious iconography of the piece precludes simple explanation, I would suggest that the notion of the body plays a crucial role in the imagery of the Vatican *sakkos*. In the first place, it is the body of Christ, transfigured on Mount Tabor, present in the Eucharist, and glorified in the Parousia. Second, it is the human body, hypostatically united with the divinity in the person of Christ, revealed in its primordial luminescence at the Transfiguration, and put on, thus recuperated, by the elect on the day of

the language of fire rather than light. For an analysis of the imagery of the *Vitae*, see K. Ware, “St. Maximos of Kapsokalyvia and Fourteenth-Century Athonite Hesychasm,” in *ΚΑΘΗΗΤΡΙΑ: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey for Her 80th Birthday*, ed. J. Chrysostomides (Camberley, 1988), 409–30, esp. 420–23.

127 Halkin, “Ermite des Balkans” (n. 79 above), 128.

128 Acts 6:15.

129 Exod. 34:29–30.

130 *De sacra precatone*, chap. 295, PG 155:544C–D. On the two Xanthopouloi, see A. M. Ammann, *Die Gottesschau im palamitischen Hesychasmus: Ein Handbuch der spätbyzantinischen Mystik* (Würzburg, 1986), 13–20.

131 Cap. 67, trans. in *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, ed. and trans. R. E. Sinkewicz (Toronto, 1988), 160–61. For the traditional background of the notion of Adam’s “garment of glory,” see S. Brock, “Some Aspects of Greek Words in Syriac,” in *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1984), 98–104.

132 Cap. 66, trans. in *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 160–61.

133 G. Millet, *La Dalmatique du Vatican: Les élus, images et croyances* (Paris, 1945); E. Piltz, *Trois sakkoi byzantins: Analyse iconographique* (Stockholm, 1976); W. T. Woodfin, “Late Byzantine Liturgical Vestments and the Iconography of Sacerdotal Power” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2002), 104–6, 161; *Byzantium: Faith and Power* (n. 13 above), cat. no. 177 (W. T. Woodfin).

134 Millet, *Dalmatique*, iii.

135 In post-Byzantine art this scene is commonly labeled Οἱ ἅγιοι πάντες. For the iconography of the scene, see T. Velmans, “Le Dimanche de Tous les saints et l’icône exposée à Charleroi (cat. n° 32),” *Byzantion* 53, no. 1 (1983): 17–35.



**Fig. 11**  
Christ in Glory, front of  
the Vatican *sakkos*, Vatican  
City, Museum of the  
Treasury, 14th century  
(photo: Scala /  
Art Resource, NY)

the general resurrection. Finally, it is the liturgical garment, the *sakkos* itself, as a new body with which the officiating bishop is invested.

In a subtle interplay of exegesis, liturgy, and eschatology, the Vatican *sakkos* exemplifies how the iconography and ritual use of vestments could effectively participate in the theological discourse on the deification of the body. Similar ideas are implicitly advanced in the double portrait of Kantakouzenos. By showing the ex-emperor in two guises, the double portrait foregrounds the idea of transition from the secular to monastic estate. As Petre Guran has aptly observed, the adoption of the monk's habit by Kantakouzenos represents "un dénudement de la gloire de ce siècle figurée par l'habit d'empereur, donc

une récupération de l'état primordial d'Adam, signifiant un revêtement de la gloire de Dieu."<sup>136</sup> In the Orthodox tradition, the rites of monastic profession are commonly allegorized using a language rich in clothing metaphors.<sup>137</sup> Commenting on the investiture with the great *schema*, Symeon of Thessalonike, for instance, states that the initiate receives the *pallion* as "a robe of incorruption and sacredness," as "a sign of the protection of God, through the life in piety, granting eternal life to the wearer," and as "a divine covering which the grace of the Spirit gives

<sup>136</sup> Guran, "Jean VI Cantacuzène" (n. 17 above), 93.

<sup>137</sup> See P. Oppenheim, *Symbolik und religiöse Wertung des Mönchskleides im christlichen Altertum* (Münster, 1932), esp. 49–51.



**Fig. 12**  
Transfiguration of Christ, back  
of the Vatican *sakkos*, Vatican  
City, Museum of the Treasury,  
14th century (photo: Scala /  
Art Resource, NY)

instead of the garments of skin.”<sup>138</sup> The reference to the “garments of skin” (χιτῶνες δερμάτινοι) is an allusion to the debased condition of humanity after the fall and expulsion from Paradise: “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). In patristic exegesis, the “garments of skin” were traditionally interpreted as a token of death, mortality, and the corruption of the body.<sup>139</sup> Thus, by putting on the habit of his calling, the monk acquires,

as it were, a new body. Symbolically enacted through the change of vesture, this bodily transformation implicitly anticipates the final resurrection, when the righteous will assume the glorious body of incorruption in which Christ was clothed on Mount Tabor.

### Final Thoughts

In his biography of John-Ioasaph Kantakouzenos, Donald M. Nicol remarks that the emperor’s “devoted and sincere championship of the doctrine of Palamas and the theory and practice of hesychasm was to have a more

<sup>138</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 50 n. 3.

<sup>139</sup> See K. Corrigan, “Text and Image on an Icon of the Crucifixion at Mount Sinai,” in *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. R. Ousterhout and L. Brubaker (Urbana, 1995), 53–54.

enduring effect than any of his political and military achievements. For the mystical theology and the veneration of his friend Palamas continue to inspire the Orthodox Christian world to this day.”<sup>140</sup> As Nicol memorably puts it, “The habit of a monk fitted him more comfortably [than imperial robes].”<sup>141</sup> Despite his fluctuating political fortunes, the emperor’s religious convictions remained steadfast. Kantakouzenos shared this passionate insistence on Orthodoxy with most of his compatriots, for whom preserving their decaying Empire was synonymous with maintaining the purity and integrity of their faith. With the ongoing expansion of the Ottoman Turks, by the second half of the fourteenth century the *basileia* had been basically reduced to Constantinople with its immediate hinterland, the region of Thessalonike, and the southeastern part of the Peloponnesos governed from Mistra. In an effort to solicit military and financial support for a crusade from the West, in 1369 Emperor John V Palaiologos (1341–1391) went to Rome, where he professed his personal submission to the Pope and converted to Catholicism in a ceremony at St. Peter’s.<sup>142</sup> The emperor’s initiative, however, proved to be of no avail. It only outraged the Byzantine masses reluctant to accept any tampering with their religious beliefs. Two years later, after the momentous defeat of the Christian army at the battle of the river Marica, John V humbly accepted the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan.<sup>143</sup>

In sharp contrast to the political and economic decline of the Empire, the spiritual authority commanded by the Ecumenical Patriarchate had significantly increased, so that it extended over most of the Orthodox Christians in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.<sup>144</sup> The

prestige enjoyed by the Byzantine Church was largely due to the ecclesiastical and monastic revival brought about by the hesychast movement. In the face of the challenges coming from the Muslim East and the Latin West, the official promulgation of the teachings of Gregory Palamas at the Constantinopolitan councils of the mid-fourteenth century came to be understood as the restoration of the true faith and the triumph of Orthodoxy that would ensure the survival of the crumbling Empire.<sup>145</sup>

With all its idiosyncrasies, the Paris codex echoes the historical moment in which it was produced. This lavish theological *summa* offered an authoritative and timely response to the overriding political and religious concerns of the 1370s. Its condensed cycle of large-scale miniatures reflects and parallels the polemical and apologetic tenor of Kantakouzenos’s writings by picturing, validating, and commenting on their verbal message. Signaling the beginnings of two separate sections of the manuscript, the double portrait and the council page foreground the person of the author by praising his devotion to Orthodoxy and the hesychast cause, commemorating his involvement in contemporary theological disputes, and implicitly rewriting his role in the embarrassing encounter with the triumphant Islam. Yet, far from being merely an exercise in self-promotion of the ex-emperor, these two images also seek to redefine the very nature and limits of imperial authority in ecclesiastical affairs vis-à-vis the pro-unionist policy of John V Palaiologos.<sup>146</sup>

The remaining two miniatures of the codex—the Transfiguration of Christ and the portrait of Gregory of Nazianzos—pertain specifically to the doctrinal issues debated in the course of the hesychast controversy. The

140 Nicol, *Reluctant Emperor* (n. 15 above), 184.

141 Ibid.

142 See O. Halecki, *Un Empereur de Byzance à Rome: Vingt ans de travail pour l’union des églises et pour la défense de l’Empire d’Orient, 1355–1375* (Warsaw, 1930), chap. 8; R. Radić, *Vreme Jovana V Paleologa (1332–1391)* (Belgrade, 1993), 344–48.

143 G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J. Hussey (Oxford, 1956), 481–82.

144 For instance, in 1375 the ecclesiastical dispute between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Serbian Church, provoked by the establishment of the autocephalous Serbian Patriarchate at Peć some twenty years before, was resolved by a compromise: the ban of excommunication launched against the Serbian Church was lifted and its rank of patriarchate was recognized. The Byzantine Church, however, retained its primacy of honor. See *ibid.*, 485. For a general treatment of the primacy of the Byzantine Church in the later Middle Ages, see Hussey, *Orthodox Church* (n. 34 above), 286–94.

145 In 1368, only nine years after his death, Palamas’s name was inscribed in the calendar of the Byzantine Church. As Meyendorff (*Introduction* [n. 1 above], 169) observed, the Second Sunday in Lent was deliberately chosen for the annual liturgical commemoration of the new hesychast saint as a kind of continuation of the Feast of Orthodoxy celebrated on the preceding Sunday. The earliest surviving editions of the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* that incorporate *anathemata* condemning anti-Palamite teachings date from about the same time. See J. Gouillard, “Le Synodikon de l’Orthodoxie: édition et commentaire,” *TM* 2 (1967): 1–316, esp. 29–32, 80–93, 239–51.

146 The historical exigencies and political and ideological concerns underpinning the production of the Paris manuscript have been admirably studied by Guran, “Jean VI Cantacuzène” (n. 17 above), 73–121. However, I do not subscribe to Guran’s interpretation that, given the absence of a nimbus in both of his portraits, Kantakouzenos wanted to emphasize “le glissement de la légitimité eschatologique de l’Empire vers l’Église” (*ibid.*, 121). For my own, much more prosaic, explanation of this iconographic peculiarity, see above, n. 38.

foregoing discussion has attempted to establish an intimate link between the scene of the Metamorphosis and the kind of mysticism cultivated in hesychast circles. Placed in the section of the manuscript addressing the very nature of the mystical experience enjoyed by hesychast monks and directly related to Gregory's statements concerning the Taboric light, the miniature is much more than a simple, self-contained devotional image in the sense that the notion of the icon in book format may imply. As I have suggested, the miniature may be construed as a piece of visual exegesis. Essentially, it functions as a pictorial *scholion* on the authoritative quotations from Gregory whose purpose is to authorize a particular interpretation of the scriptural narrative and, by extension, to lend further credence to Kantakouzenos's argument about the uncreated light expounded in the text. Through an imaginative manipulation of familiar iconographic and pictorial motifs, this exceptional image comments on, rather than merely illustrates, the theophanic vision on Mount Tabor. The chosen few who had the privilege of perusing the Paris codex must have been fairly conversant with the constellation of topoi, metaphors, similes, and typological links around which the exegesis of the Transfiguration was elaborated in the doctrinal and ascetic literature of the period. Prompted by subtle deviations from the otherwise normative iconography, they were invited to meditate on the resplendent tableau of divine revelation displayed before their eyes. The miniature, in fact, allows for multiple interpretations. It encourages the viewer to mentally reconstruct and reconfigure the messages layered into its visual fabric by evoking a familiar set of textual and pictorial references. The range of associations triggered by the miniature encapsulates several major themes of hesychast mysticism: the spiritual ascent of the mountain of contemplation, ecstasy and vision of the uncreated light, and quest for the fullness of eschatological reality.

As the reader must have realized by now, the present article did not propose a new, overarching interpretation of the relationship between hesychasm and art in Late Byzantium. Rather, my aim was to suggest that, even in a work undoubtedly informed by hesychast mysticism and doctrine such as the Paris codex of Kantakouzenos's theological writings, this relationship is not straightforward, nor could it be reduced to the questions of iconography or style. The hesychast movement could not and did not develop a unified attitude toward the visual arts. Instead of searching for a holistic and by necessity reductive inter-

pretation, a more fruitful approach to the subject is to look at the plurality of modes in which the art of the period may have responded to the spiritual ideals and religious and cultural priorities promoted by the movement. Theological exegesis and painting, as Michael Baxandall has noted, "are, in a consequential way, incommensurable and divergent discourses."<sup>147</sup> Yet, if theology is understood not so much as a prescriptive body of doctrine but rather as a set of procedures, exegetical tropes, and patterns of thought, and, more broadly, as a way of structuring religious experience, then it may also be seen as a conceptual matrix conditioning the production and reception of religious imagery.<sup>148</sup> With its teachings, spirituality, and devotional practice, hesychasm fundamentally affected the religious experience of its partisans and supporters; it must also have informed the ways in which they looked at and apprehended images that surrounded them. We cannot afford to write off the more "esoteric" aspects of the Late Byzantine monastic revival as being divorced from the *saeculum* and instead "seek a common ground between art and hesychasm in its sermons and the tenets of its sacramental theology."<sup>149</sup> Nor should the silence of hesychast theologians on the subject of art and the much-professed insistence on imageless devotion deceive us:<sup>150</sup> a type of mysticism that privileges sight to other senses and foregrounds vision, even if achieved with the mind's eye rather than with bodily eyes, as the ultimate vehicle of communication with the divinity, could not but embrace the visual in its diverse manifestations, from dreams and apparitions to images on panels, church walls, or pages of illuminated manuscripts.

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147 M. Baxandall, "Pictorially Enforced Signification: St. Anthonius, Fra Angelico and the Annunciation," in *Hülle und Fülle: Festschrift für Tilmann Buddensieg*, ed. A. Beyer et al. (Alfter, 1993), 33.

148 See the important discussion in J. F. Hamburger, "The Place of Theology in Medieval Art History: Problems, Positions, Possibilities," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. idem and A.-M. Bouché (Princeton, 2006), 11–31.

149 As suggested by Carr, "Images" (n. 13 above), 151.

150 It is interesting to note that no less an accomplished hesychast mystic than Maximos Kausokalybites apparently cultivated a highly personal and affective devotion centered on Marian icons, one of which was the famed Hodegetria. See Halkin, "Deux vies," 70 and 85. For a brief comment on this trait of Maximos's spiritual habitus, see Ware, "St. Maximos of Kapsokalyvia," 427 (both n. 126 above).